Vol. IV. No. 4. March, 1936

SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

Edited by

D. W. HARDING L. C. KNIGHTS
F. R. LEAVIS DENYS THOMPSON

CONTENTS

SCRUTINY OF MODERN GREATS, by *E. W. F. Tomlin* *page* 344

ENGLISH FOR THE SCHOOL CERTIFICATE: A NOTE, by *Frank Chapman* 358

TRAGIC PHILOSOPHY, by *G. Santayana* 365

REVALUATIONS (IX): KEATS, by *F. R. Leavis* 376

POST OBITUM: DIAGHILEFF, PAVLOVA, by *Vladimir Kameneff* 401

THE TENDENCIES OF BERGSONISM, by *H. B. Parkes* 407

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS 427

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MUSICAL TASTE, Burney's *General History of Music*, reviewed by Bruce Pattison (p. 427). W. EMPSON'S CRITICISM, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, reviewed by H. A. Mason (p. 431). A NEW CRITIC OF BALLET, reviews by D.W.H. and E.M. (p. 435). *The Asiatics*, reviewed by E. S. Huelin (p. 438). REGIONAL NOVELS, *Honey in the Horn*, etc., reviewed by Q. D. Leavis (p. 440). *Totem : the Exploitation of Youth*, reviewed by Frank Chapman (p. 447). AN AMATEUR OF LITERATURE, *The Literary Career of Sir Egerton Brydges*, reviewed by R. G. Cox (p. 449). 'CLIQUE-PUFFERY,' reviews by Geoffrey Walton (p. 452). *Human Ecology*, reviewed by C. E. Lucas (p. 455). *Catholicism, Protestantism and Capitalism*, reviewed by L. C. Knights (p. 457). *The Press*, reviewed by Denys Thompson (p. 458).

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCRUTINY OF MODERN GREATS

I.

THE first examination for the Honour School of Politics, Philosophy and Economics, commonly called Modern Greats, was held in 1923. The School is therefore old enough to have reared a generation of specialized instructors, a representative selection of 'finished products,' and a formidable structure of criticism. With the first of these categories, we are not immediately concerned ; with the second, we ought perhaps to be more concerned than we are ; and with the third, we are told we are more concerned than we need be. Criticism at this stage, however, is no longer premature ; and the fact that it exists in abundance and issues from a variety of sources, cannot be dismissed lightly. The difficulty is to discover how far it is dictated by genuine interest in educational welfare, and how far by prejudice. We say prejudice, because we suspect that in many cases Modern Greats is condemned not because it is a bad School in itself, but because it is the kind of School that has no business to be popular at Oxford. Prejudice of this kind, in so far as it is the product of academic snobbery, need not detain us. But prejudice is very rarely unmixed, and that is a reason for accounting for its origin and persistence.

To review the syllabus of a particular School at a particular University, even if the University is Oxford and the School as celebrated as Modern Greats, is difficult in that one is never quite sure how much knowledge to take for granted. On the other hand, it is not at all necessary that everyone should be familiar with details, any more than it is necessary that *everyone* should have read a book before it is reviewed. Most people have heard of Greats, though few have heard enough to be able to criticize it intelligently, or even to know that it needs criticizing. We tend to think of Greats as we tend to think of the Roman Church or the laws of the Medes and Persians ; something permanent and unalterable. Modern Greats, on the other hand, while coming to supplant Greats as a subject of public discussion, has so far enjoyed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a less enviable popularity. The attention of the public has been occupied not so much with the School itself as with criticism of the School ; and that which is never described except in terms of what it ought to be has little chance of receiving adequate appraisal in terms of what it is. For the purposes of this paper, the critics may be divided into two classes. There are those who object to the School as a whole, and would like it abolished ; and there are those who, approving of the School in theory, deny that it adequately embodies the aims of its founders. Put in another fashion, we may say that the first type of criticism is from those who complain that Modern Greats is not Greats ; while the second type of criticism is from those who complain that, as at present constituted, the Modern Greats School is still not enough unlike Greats to justify the title of Modern.

That the School has been attacked from two positions, and from these two in particular, is by no means accidental. Modern Greats was originally designed not so much—or rather, not exclusively—to replace the School of Literæ Humaniores (Classical Greats) as to complement it. To quote the authoritative statement of Mr. P. E. Matheson in the *Oxford University Handbook* (1932) : ' This School, like Greats, is a composite School, consisting of Philosophy and History, with Economics, but is confined to the study of the Modern World.' Mr. Weldon, in an article published in *The New Oxford Outlook* for November, 1933, gives the following definition of what he conceives to be the purpose of the School. ' The purpose of Modern Greats . . . is to provide a course essentially similar to that offered by Greats, for the benefit of candidates who either are interested rather in the problems of modern history and civilization than in those of the ancient world or are precluded from a detailed study of the latter by lack of acquaintance with Greek and Latin.'

We rather gather from this that Greats is intended to be the study of Ancient Civilization and Modern Greats the study of Modern Civilization ; and that Modern Greats was designed both for those who might be expected not to derive any light on Modern Civilization from Greats, and for those who, however strong their desire to study Ancient Civilization, were precluded from doing so by reason of the limitations of their knowledge ; being thereby reduced to the alternative of studying Modern Civilization in Modern

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Greats or taking some other School altogether.

Is is scarcely necessary to point out that the definitions just quoted are not as clear as they might be. Great play is made of the words Civilization, Ancient, and Modern, but little indication is given of how these words are used. It is unjust, however, to expect too much of an arbitrary definition, and all definitions are to some extent arbitrary. What we must do is examine the details of the syllabus, and see if we can arrive at a more accurate view that way.

Candidates for the Honour School of Politics, Philosophy and Economics are required to take the following papers: in philosophy, a paper on General Philosophy from Descartes to the present day, and on Moral and Political Philosophy covering the same period ; in Politics, a paper on Political Institutions, and on British Political and Constitutional History since 1760 ; in Economics, a paper on Economic Theory, on Economic Organization, and *either* on British Social and Economic History since 1760 *or* on Political History (European) from 1871 to 1914. Finally, candidates must choose two Special Subjects from either Politics, Philosophy or Economics, and must qualify themselves in two modern languages.

How much this perfunctory list will convey to those without personal experience of the working of the School, it is not easy to determine. Most people will feel, however, that there are certain definite questions which need answering. First of all, does the syllabus as outlined adequately provide for the study of Modern Civilization? Is it reasonable to expect, in other words, that the average undergraduate will derive from his studies a coherent picture of the Modern World? Further, does the syllabus provide as adequately for the study of the Modern World as the syllabus for Classical Greats provides for the study of the Ancient World? And lastly, how far does the course provide ' compensation ' for those who, being prevented by ignorance from studying the civilization of yesterday, are compelled to master two modern languages in order to study the civilization of to-day?

It is hoped that by the end of this paper an answer will have been given to all these questions. We do not intend, however, to call them up one by one, tick off their names and pronounce a separate verdict upon each. Our intention is to begin with the first, and gradually expand our answer until it has included all

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the rest. This will obviate the need for repetition and cross-references, and is altogether the least wasteful method of approach.

To what extent, then, does the Modern Greats syllabus cater for the study of Modern Civilization? And first, how is the phrase ' Modern Civilization ' defined? What is it, in short, that is studied by Modern Greats and not by Greats, and that differentiates the one from the other?

Let us see if an answer can be found by examining the philosophical section of the School.

Of all subjects, Philosophy is least benefited by chronological treatment. That the last twenty-five centuries have witnessed a ' development ' of philosophical thought is certain ; and perhaps the most convincing proof of such a development is the presence in us of a desire to look for one. But philosophical development is different from scientific development in that is proceeds according to no known chronological sequence. A philosophical theory may receive its most adequate formulation long after it has been conclusively refuted ; and this is enough to make us doubt whether the word ' refutation,' as applied to philosophical theories, is wholly apt. You can no more ' refute ' Plato's Theory of Ideas than you can refute Hegel's Logic. You can of course pick a number of holes in the general structure, you can even demonstrate that major arguments are fallacious, but the structure itself you must take or leave. All this points to the conclusion that Philosophy is best studied as a whole or not at all ; that you cannot begin it at some point in the middle, even though this point happens to be a conventional landmark, such as the beginning of Modern Times. The fact that the philosophical section of Modern Greats begins with Descartes shows that the originators of the School had been listening to the text-book jargon about Descartes, ' the Founder of the Modern Consciousness.' Moreover, if it is true that Greats is intended to be the study of Ancient Civilization, and Modern Greats the study of Modern Civilization, we should first like to be told why, in order to understand Ancient Civilization, we should need to study both Ancient *and* Modern Philosophy, while in order to understand Modern Civilization, we should need only to study Modern Philosophy. Modern Civilization presumably begins about the time of Descartes ; about that time, therefore, Ancient Civilization ends. But apparently

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it is more important that we should study Ancient Civilization in its death-agonies than Modern Civilization in its birth-pangs. A comparison of the two Schools would seem to imply that while there is general agreement as to the point where Modern Civilization begins, there is no such agreement as to the point where Ancient Civilization ends. For how is it that students of Greats are on the whole far more interested in the latest refinements of modern logic than students of Modern Greats? Presumably, because the study of modern logic throws greater light on Ancient Civilization than on Modern Civilization ; and that this is nonsense, we need not wait for a Greats scholar to point out. In short, the idea that Modern Greats is distinguished from Greats by being the study of Modern rather than of Ancient Civilization is absurd ; and the sooner we have done with this preconception, the better.

Once you give up regarding Modern Greats as the study of Modern Civilization, however, the difficulty is to decide how otherwise to regard it. For unless the Modern Greats School is conceived as having some other end in view than the School of Classical Greats or the School of Modern History, it is in danger of relapsing into a lesser or diluted Greats, and losing all identity. The case of Philosophy is especially relevant for this reason. Philosophy, we have seen, cannot be studied by halves. Modern Philosophy is not intelligible without some knowledge of Ancient Philosophy. This is obvious enough not to be mentioned ; or rather, to be mentioned only by those who on other points have betrayed a curious insensitivity to the obvious ; to be mentioned, therefore, by the designers of Modern Greats. There is, as one would expect, a great disparity between the regulations laid down in the Statute and the actual business of teaching the subjects prescribed. In so far as this is a disparity between theory and practice, nothing need be said about it. But there is always another kind of disparity to consider ; that between a theory which was never capable of practice, and a practice which is only nominally the practice of any theory. And such a disparity would seem to exist between the theory and practice of Modern Greats.

Candidates for the School are often helped to realize the comprehensive nature of the task before them by consulting the unofficial bioliography prepared for their benefit by the Oxford Association for Politics, Philosophy and Economics. This Biblio-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

graphy contains a brief preface, disclaiming that ' the following suggestions for reading ' have ' any pretence to authority,' and—even more modestly—that ' it is not to be expected that any candidate will have read all, or nearly all, the books named, or that there are not others which he might profitably read instead.' On the other hand, and rather tending to discount the value of the previous remark, it is suggested that ' the range of knowledge appropriate to the School ' is ' not confined ' to the books mentioned.

We do not propose to comment on the manner in which this selection has been made, nor to add to an already overburdened list any suggestions of our own. The selection is, on the whole, a conventional one ; and it is pretty exhaustive. But what interests us at the moment is not so much the list itself as the ' rubrics ' which are prefaced to its various divisions. The first division, dealing with books suitable for the paper entitled ' General Philosophy from Descartes to the present time,' is divided into three sections. The third section, entitled ' Historical Background,' is headed by the statement: ' *Some notion* of the mediæval philosophy in which Descartes was brought up may be gathered from Gilson, E., *La Philosophie au Moyen Age*.' (My Italics). The second division, giving a list of books suitable for the paper on Moral and Political Philosophy, is headed by the statement: ' Though Ancient Philosophy is not included within the scope of the School, students would find it of *great value*, in this part of their work, to read Plato's *Republic*, or Aristotle's *Politics*, at least Books I, III, VII.'

No doubt the best way of dealing with these statements is to let them speak for themselves ; but that, in an age of universal education, is becoming more and more dangerous. When everyone can read, and read, within limits, what he likes, the danger is not that the reader will like the wrong things (though this may well happen) but that he will read what he likes into the right things. When everything can be named, everything must be labelled. The two statements quoted above, although they nominally concern only the philosophical part of the School, really give the whole game away. They shatter the notion both that Modern Greats is an autonomous course of study, and that Modern Philosophy is a coherent system which begins about the time of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Descartes and can be studied as if it were entirely without foundation in the past. If we are told, for example, that 'some notion of the mediæval background of Descartes' philosophy can be found in Gilson's *Philosophie au Moyen Age*,' the inference is that the more we know about this background, the better will be our study of Descartes. And if we are told, in addition, that students will find it of great value in their studies of Moral and Political Philosophy to read Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Politics*, at least Books I, III, and VII, the inference is that the study of Modern Philosophy, in its moral and political aspects, will be greatly enhanced, not to say illuminated, by a study of the moral and political philosophy of the past. But if Modern Philosophy can only be understood with reference to Ancient Philosophy, then a thorough study of Modern Philosophy will begin long before the *Discours de la Méthode*. This is a further proof that the definition of Modern Greats as 'the study of Modern Civilization' is unjustified. The truth is that Greats, with its provision for both Ancient *and* Modern Philosophy, is a much better study of Modern Civilization than Modern Greats; and the reason is that Greats is also the study of Ancient Civilization.

We are now in a position to take notice of a situation which is certainly anomalous, and may well be called scandalous. It is a fact that certain Colleges in Oxford, whether out of snobbery or a genuine feeling of distrust, refuse to include among their tutoring staff a specialist instructor in Modern Greats. That is scandalous, but not so scandalous as something else. It is also a fact that a candidate for Modern Greats who has a philosophical turn of mind; who choses his two Special Subjects from the philosophical section; who takes perhaps the same logic paper as is taken by students of Greats; who obtains the highest honours in philosophy, and possibly in the other sections as well; such a student, however much he may desire to pursue his philosophical studies, and however many facilities man be open for post-graduate research, is utterly debarred from doing so. His claims will be rejected, not because he is an inferior philosopher (he may not be), but simply because he has taken Modern Greats; it is a matter of pure academic 'class-feeling.' A philosophical training in the Modern Greats School is apparently regarded as insufficient qualification for advanced research in philosophy. There is good reason for

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

believing that this verdict is sound ; but what a scandalous thing for the authorities to have to admit! The result is that all the philosophical instruction in Modern Greats is carried out by Greats men. We are very glad that it is. But if it is the case that Modern Philosophy is most efficiently taught by those who possess both classical training and a knowledge of Ancient Philosophy, will it not also be the case that Modern Philosophy is most efficiently *learned* in conjunction with Ancient Philosophy, as we find in Greats?

We thus arrive at the following paradox. The philosophical section of Modern Greats is designed for the study of Modern Philosophy. In other words, if you want to study Modern Philosophy at Oxford, you should take Modern Greats. Let us suppose, then, that you take your Finals, and pass with flying philosophical colours. After that, you may wish to pursue your studies further. You examine the available facilities for doing so, and find, after making enquiries, that philosophical research is only open to students of Greats. In short, to do what you want to do—and to do, apparently, what you set out to do—you must do, or have done, Greats. That is to say, you must do Greats *even* if you want to study what is the nominal aim of Modern Greats—Modern Philosophy.

The danger at this point is to conclude that Modern Greats is a hopeless medley of confused aims. There is certainly a case for calling it a confused medley, but not a hopeless case. We observed at the beginning that criticism of the School is of two kinds. The reason is that Modern Greats is a bungled attempt to do two things. It was called into being to supply a genuine need—to provide something which Greats did not provide—but it was called into being by men trained in the Greats tradition. It is worth remembering that the original aim was to create a ' Science Greats,' but this project fell through ; and the final plan was to make a School which should resemble Greats as much as possible, but which should at the same time provide for the study of a subject hitherto neglected in Oxford—Economics.

Thus we must grant from the outset that Modern Greats was intended to supply a long-felt need. More and more undergraduates wish to study Economics, and Modern Greats at least saves them from the London School of Economics. But how many who wish to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

study Economics wish also to study Modern Philosophy is another question ; one suspects, not many. Those who arrive at the university enthusiastic to study Philosophy have probably had their enthusiasm kindled by a classical education. They can go straight on to Greats. There cannot be many who come up wishing to study only Modern Philosophy ; but if there are, there is no reason on earth why their wishes should be satisfied. The desire to study only what is Modern is a desire that education should remove. Modern Greats has a tendency to pander to this desire ; and in this respect it is working against the educational process. That there do exist individuals who combine a genuine interest in Philosophy with comparative ignorance of Classics, the writer can faithfully attest. What to do with such individuals is no easy problem ; and certainly nothing can be done which could not have been done better at School. A University has enough of its own to do, without taking on the tasks of institutions subordinate to it ; and it is scarcely necessary to point out that the problem of University education and the problem of School education are not two problems but one. There is a tendency to assume that a University should meet the qualifications of its students rather than that the students should meet the requirements of the University ; and there will always be a minority who, though qualified for one course, are impatient to take another. For the moment, however, let us pass over the unfortunate group of persons debarred from taking Greats owing to ignorance of Classics, and turn to that other growing body which is anxious to concentrate on Economics.

Much of the unwieldiness of Modern Greats is due to its tripartite division—a division which only has significance by virtue of a supposed central unity. It follows, therefore, that if this unity is found to be unreal, the whole structure of the School disintegrates ; and this is what in fact has happened. In practice, the student finds himself concentrating on one subject and neglecting the other two ; or racing through the other two in a frantic effort to get down to the one he prefers. And since the majority of students enter for Modern Greats in order to study Economics—or possibly Economics and Politics (though Politics is in the curious position of being half philosophical and therefore in danger of falling between two stools), the tendency is most often to scamp

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Philosophy. The annual harm done to the cause of Philosophy by Modern Greats must therefore be considerable ; but the harm does not end there. The cause of Economics also suffers, since the repudiation of abstract thinking in one sphere is not likely to stimulate its exercise in another ; and no subject is more in need of a logical basis than Economics. What is to be deduced from this tendency towards disintegration? And what future can we predict for a School which exhibits such centrifugal elements?

The answer must be a tentative one. We point out, however, this very significant fact: namely, that in one respect the Modern Greats School is becoming more and more of a pretence, while in another respect it is becoming more and more of a reality. As a 'compensation' School for those who are ignorant of Classics but anxious to study Philosophy, we believe that it must become increasingly inadequate. It is no compensation for a philosophically inclined student to have to imbibe quantities of Economics, History and Politics for the sake of a little diluted Philosophy. On the other hand, we believe that for those wishing to make a thorough study of Economics, Modern Greats is likely to become more and more congenial. The Statute for the School lays it down that 'the highest honours can be attained by excellence in *either* Politics *or* Philosophy *or* Economics, provided that adequate knowledge is shown in the other subjects of examination.' When so much latitude is allowed in the Statute, the student can hardly be blamed for allowing himself a little more. If therefore we are right in suggesting that Modern Greats will increasingly become the chosen School for economists, its transformation into an Honour School of Economics is merely a matter of time. If Modern Greats is ever to be a School, as Greats is a School and History is a School, it will have to be one thing and not three things. And at present it is not even three things, but one thing and two hindrances.

II.

During our first part we have confined ourselves very much to realities. A reviewer must at least begin by reviewing the object as it is, and not as he would like it to be ; though his method of approach will be dictated to an incalculable extent by his prepossessions. We have asked, and attempted to answer,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

such questions as whether Modern Greats succeeds in justifying its claims to be an autonomous School. We have not yet asked another question: namely, can Modern Greats, either in theory or practice, be described as an *education*? That opens a large vista ; and it is a vista which we have only one excuse for opening at this point—namely, that to have opened it at any previous point would have been even less excusable.

The first requisite is the admission of bias. The present writer believes that, with the possible exception of English Literature, the one School at Oxford which provides the undergraduate with an education in the highest sense is Greats. This prejudice, which is shared by a decreasing number of people, must be taken into account in the following discussion of the claims of Modern Greats to be an ' alternative ' education to Greats. But here I must forestall a possible criticism. I do not intend to set up Greats as a measuring rod, and estimate how far Modern Greats falls short of it. I propose rather to try to determine in what respects Modern Greats succeeds in being a training of the mind at all.

I do not wish to commit myself in this paper to any concise definition of Education: suffice it to say that for me the word suggests training, rather than filling, the mind. The question of priority—*when* we should cease training and start ' filling '—seems to me quite bogus ; the kind of question which will trouble a man for as long as he keeps out of the class-room. Provisioning and training are concomitant ; they advance hand in hand ; and you can over-exercise just as certainly as you can over-eat. The tendency to-day is to overdo the provisioning ; the tendency of the Old Education was probably to overdo the training. But one thing is certain: that the acquisition of knowledge should be regarded as subordinate to the training of the mind at least until such time as the mind has been trained sufficiently to regard it as otherwise. The actual time taken does not matter. What matters is the process ; for the process is education itself. And anything calling itself education which is not this, is a disguised form of cramming. Now the difference between education and cramming is the difference between a process and an accumulation. The majority of criticisms of the traditional theory of education are concerned not with the process—for not even the most radical advocate of the New Education has attacked the *idea* behind the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

traditional view—but with the process at an arrested stage. And the fact that the critics realize so clearly that the process has been arrested, leads one to wonder why they do not go on to the realization that it may have been choked.

The School of Modern Greats typifies this thirst for information to an alarming degree. I use the word alarming in no journalistic sense. The perversion of the Old Education was pedantry—and pedantry is abhorrent ; but the perversion of the New Education is illiteracy—and illiteracy is a menace. The Modern Greats School is capable, I am convinced, of turning out minds seething with information, well-informed, sophisticated, but quite illiterate. And where it does not breed illiteracy—for we must not suppose that everyone turned out by Modern Greats is a moron—it tends to breed a vapid latitudinarianism of outlook, which is merely a disguised form of narrowness. To a mind which requires stimulus, it is an assault ; to a mind which is receptive, it is a surfeit ; and to a mind which is already a little awakened to what a true education should be, it only ceases to be a temptation in becoming a positive nuisance.

Ever since the School was founded, projects have been launched for its reform ; and we spoke at the beginning of the sources from which criticism is usually derived. Those who attack the School from the Greats standpoint have naturally very little to offer in the way of constructive criticism ; they see in Modern Greats nothing but a parody of Greats. Constructive criticism usually comes from those who superintend the Economics part of the School. Their usual burden is that Economics is a full-time job (so it is) and should not be interrupted by less 'urgent' subjects like Philosophy. Sometimes their reasons are not even as good as this: we occasionally hear it declared that since all our difficulties are at bottom economic difficulties, economic instruction is all the education a modern citizen should receive.

To those who believe that Modern Greats fails to provide an education in the sense that Greats provides an education, the difficulty is to take these proposals seriously. You cannot wholeheartedly reform an institution which you regard as thoroughly and inherently corrupt. On the other hand, such summary condemnation is not going to carry us very far ; or rather, it is so far-reaching in itself that, in any committee of reform, it would

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

simply be passed over as impracticable. In a sense, it is too easy, too clear-cut, too out of touch with things as they are. And when we are faced with things as they are, the problem is not how much evil to cast out, but, as Burke so acutely put it, how much evil to tolerate.

Looking at Modern Greats from this standpoint, we can suggest several respects in which the School might be reformed. In the first place, there are far too many papers. To take but one example: there is a paper on Moral and Political Philosophy and there is a paper on Political Institutions. I see no reason why these papers should not be combined. The Political Philosophy paper is presumably marked by philosophers. The Political Institutions paper is more likely to be marked by specialists. Let us suppose, however, that the paper on Political Institutions contains a question such as: What is a Political Institution? (The question occurred last year). This question, I submit, is a philosophical question: that is to say, it cannot be answered unless it it treated from a philosophical point of view. Now let us suppose that a candidate specializing in Philosophy makes this assumption, and writes a philosophical statement of what he conceives a Political Institution to be. If his answer is marked by a historian or a specialist in Politics or Economics, the chances are—I do not say that this is always the case ; merely that there is very good reason for suggesting that it may easily happen—that what he has written will be regarded as utter nonsense. No doubt it will be pointed out that each paper is scrutinized several times and by several different persons. This is true: but the case of Modern Greats is rather different in this respect from that of other Schools. Do the examiners in Economics, for instance, have a share in revising the papers on Philosophy? Do the Philosophers revise the papers on Economics? Are the Philosophers called in to mark a philosophical question that happens to occur in the paper on Political Instructions? If so, why do they take this extra trouble? Why are not philosophical questions in Politics confined to their proper place—*i.e.*, the paper on Political Philosophy? The answer is presumably that those who set the paper on Political Institutions are not always aware that a question they happen to set *is* a philosophical question.

This raises a fundamental point, but one which, for various

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reasons—primarily because the subject is outside my competence—I hesitate to touch upon. Something, however, must be said about it. We have so far spoken mostly from the point of view of candidates ; we must not forget, however, that the examiners have parallel difficulties to face. When half the examiners are Economists and half Philosophers—the proportion is not as even as that, because there are Historians as well—the problem of assessing a candidate's ' general ' merit (a problem most apparent in the *viva voce* examination) becomes very complicated. It is not part of the intention of this paper to discuss problems of administration, however, except in so far as they illustrate the thesis we have been maintaining. We mention this absence of administrative unity, therefore, merely in order to provide a further example of a lack of unity running through the entire structure of the School.

Secondly, the School might be ' rationalized ' by putting into practice a suggestion made by Mr. Weldon in the article quoted at the beginning. The suggestion is that the two Special Subjects should be made voluntary. By this method, the transition from a state of blurred miscellaneity to a coherent and unified structure might well be accomplished. Mr. Weldon, however, does not envisage as radical a change in the School as we do here ; most of the reforms he suggests are concerned with making the course more manageable. In our opinion, the two Special Subjects should be made to absorb those parts of the School which, for the majority of students, are mere encumbrances. The first might be Political Philosophy, and the second General Philosophy ; subjects which could be taken by those who showed special aptitude for them. In course of time, it is possible that Philosophy would become as neglected a subject in Modern Greats as Psychology is in Greats ; but at least it would be there, and it would satisfy the small number of persons who lack the knowledge to study Philosophy in Greats.

The difficulty in writing this review of Modern Greats has been to keep a just balance between the general and the particular. A niggling commentary on the School's syllabus might have been useful to the practical reformer, but would have had little interest for anybody else. A string of generalities on the trend of Modern Education, with Modern Greats as a prevailing, but none too precise, symbol, would have been hardly less inadequate. I have

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tried to steer clear of these two extremes in the hope that I may have steered between them. On the one hand, there is the danger of becoming an alarmist ; of giving the impression that Modern Greats is turning out a stream of mental freaks. And on the other hand, there is the danger of over-complacency—a danger which, in trying to dissociate ourselves from a sensationalist Decline-of-the-West attitude, we may find ourselves unconsciously embracing. But whichever attitude we take, and whatever proposals we adopt, we cannot expect to get very far without a general theory of education ; a theory which, if implicit, is likely to be all the more powerful. It is precisely because we do not find the theory behind Modern Greats a coherent one, that we join in the cry for reform. But unless we wish to substitute one incoherence for another, we should be advised to make clear in our minds what it is we are undertaking, and to realize that it matters a good deal in what name we undertake it.

E. W. F. TOMLIN.

ENGLISH FOR THE SCHOOL CERTIFICATE: A NOTE

IN a short experience of teaching (the shortness may be painfully obvious to teachers who read this note), I have, like all schoolmasters, found myself up against the School Certificate and Matriculation. There has been plenty of comment on these examinations as a whole, and everyone has been blamed by someone—universities, teachers, employers. The greatest iniquity is, of course, not the year's work done before the examination, but the fact that, as a general rule, the whole school course, from entrance, is directed towards this consummation. Everything that seems irrelevant is likely to be deprecated even by those who, themselves, deplore the necessity of keeping to such a comparatively narrow syllabus. However, the chances of the abolition of the School Certificate and the examination system, as a whole, are remote, indeed, in the present framework of society ; as it is, even pupils at the most advanced schools often feel compelled to take Matric. in their own interests. There might be some faint chance

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of certain reforms within the syllabus, if the examination boards were to co-operate, but there is little hope of this.

In the School Certificate, with which I am most familar, the English examination consists of three papers—composition, précis, and set books. The composition paper consists of an essay—there is usually a choice of four subjects—and about two short ' general knowledge ' questions, on such things as the use of words, explanation of idioms, and so on. The essay subjects are inclined to give scope to whimsicality or vague generalities, but this is a fault which is extremely difficult to avoid when setting subjects to an average class. (The disastrous thing is that, even in spite of oneself, one is inclined to give extra marks to the whimsical or even ' poetical ' essay, as a relief from the usual amorphous mass. After all, one is to some extent justified: the writer has learnt to put sentences together correctly and coherently—a comparatively rare attainment).

The précis paper usually consists of a piece of oratorical or narrative prose, about a thousand words in length, to reduce to a third of the original. Précis is said to be useful in ' business ' ; hence, I suppose, its very prominent place in the examination. It is also claimed that it makes for accurate thinking—a claim that might bear investigation, if the paper, and the course for it were somewhat different. But the tendency is for every passage, whatever its length, to be reduced automatically to a third of the original, this being the requirement of the actual paper set in the examination. Both the papers set and the volumes of selections used in class contain passages of widely varied merit and type—yet all are to be reduced to the same proportions. On the face of it, it seems absurd to imagine that a speech by Pitt, an extract from one of Scott's novels, and a scene from Shakespeare are all equally capable of reduction, yet the demand is the same in all cases, and exactly the same amount and kind of effort is required. There is never any question of the merit of the original—indeed, many précis books claim to contain passages of a uniformly high standard ; a claim, which, even if it were true, is not altogether desirable. For the whole value of précis, together with its claim for inculcating accurate thinking, must depend on its ability to develop the critical spirit—to distinguish between the writer who has something to say, and the one who is merely padding out in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an effort to create atmosphere, or to disguise the muddled quality of his own thought. Yet it is obvious that no such thing is required of the examinee—otherwise, there would be some variation from the mechanical reiteration of ' about one-third of the original length.' Many passages set could be reduced to a very few lines by a pupil with a moderate training in the use of words—yet I shudder to think of his fate in the examination if he ventured to write much less than the magic third.

I believe, definitely, that a course of précis could be of the utmost value, if taken in close connection with the rest of the syllabus. It would involve careful enquiry into the meaning and handling of words ; many examples of corrupt prose are needed for the purpose of comparison and these can be found in our politicians' speeches and our newspapers' leaders, careful verbal analysis of which should help a lot to bring about a critical and level-headed outlook on contemporary problems. It should also be possible to combine précis with literary appreciation by contrasting parallel passages from authors of different degrees of merit.

It is possible to do a little of this kind of work within the restrictions of the present syllabus, but more than a little takes us too far away from examination requirements, and leaves us unprepared. As it is, we must train our pupils to pick out a string of ' main points ' and join them together into what appears to be a summary of the passage, without any reference to the importance or validity of these points in themselves. Perhaps the best criticism of the present course is that, on comparing notes with other masters, I find that précis usually offers an opportunity for boys, otherwise weak in English, to pull up to a higher position. Recently, in a test given to a School Certificate form, which I have been teaching, three papers were set—essay, précis and set books. One boy was top in précis with 74 per cent., bottom in essay with 14 per cent., and obtained 41 per cent. in set books. It should be added that each paper was marked by a different master, but I do not think this made any appreciable difference.

To discuss the set books paper is, in some ways, very difficult, in others, fatally easy. Nearly everyone is familiar with the syllabus and lay-out of the paper, but it may be as well to remind readers of these. In the particular School Certificate examination I have been referring to, there are three set books, this being the usual

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

number, although, I believe, some examining bodies prescribe five. The master responsible for the English syllabus has to select the books as follows—one play of Shakespeare from three set, one book of verse from three, and one book of prose from three. This year's syllabus may be taken as representative: one from *Twelfth Night*, *Richard II* and *Romeo and Juliet* (the latter a somewhat unexpected innovation) ; one from *The Nonne Prestes Tale*, a book of nineteenth century narrative poems (chief items ' Michael,' ' Lamia,' ' Mazeppa's Ride,' ' The Holy Grail '), and a volume of selections from Byron ; one from *Virginibus Puerisque*, one of the stock essay-anthologies, and John Buchan's *Book of Escapes* (modern prose finds its place—the examiners must keep up-to-date —and Lord Tweedsmuir's prose is so correct). It is easy to see that this results in the greater part of one's time in class being spent on the detailed study of three texts completely unrelated to each other, or to any valid study of literature. It is difficult to see what object is in the minds of those responsible for the set books paper. The only defence I have ever heard was by a Cambridge don, with reference to the same system in the English Tripos. He said that it was to make sure the student knew at least a few works of literature thoroughly, and didn't have a mere smattering of everything. To me, at any rate, it seems incredible that anyone sufficiently interested in literature to read for the English Tripos should have to be forced to concentrate by being given *In Memoriam* or the *Essay on Man* or the *Testament of Beauty* to study in detail. In a School syllabus where English is an important and compulsory subject, things may be different, but I am still unable to think what good can be done to the average class of 14 or 15 year-olds—or, indeed, to anyone else—by the close study of three arbitrarily chosen texts, more often than not of the anthology or selections type. The nature of this close study, too, is useless, if not harmful. It takes the form of explanations of all references in the text—historical, mythological and so on—with a view to the compulsory ' context ' question, and, after the first reading, a division of the text into various sub-headings, with notes on each to prepare the class for the questions they will get. So, for instance, in a Shakespeare play there will be notes on the important characters, on the use of rhyme, prose, song, the various types of humour, the use

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the supernatural (if any) and the usual run of stock questions. Any attempt to assess the worth of the text as a whole must be regarded as quite outside the syllabus—the nearest approach to a question requiring judgment is 'State which poems in *Poems of To-day* you prefer ; give reasons.' *Poems of To-day* (either series) is a popular choice. Then the whole scope of the examination precludes reference to other works, and, as the English syllabus in lower forms is designed to prepare for the great consummation of Matric., it is sheer luck if the boys happen to have read a text that is useful for comparative purposes. And it is not reasonable to expect the average boy to devote any of his spare time to reading outside his syllabus, just for the sake of comparisons. He won't see the sense of it, and I don't blame him (encouraging them to read on their own account is an entirely different matter ; it is a voluntary activity, and depends on the ability and enthusiasm of the master). Of course, no one is supposed to doubt the merit of the books chosen, and, of course, everyone does. If a boy tells you he doesn't like *Virginibus Puerisque*, you may give a guarded agreement but he must still be made to learn the notes you give him on it ; a state of affairs that must, obviously, have the worst possible effects on both parties in its encouragement of mutual hypocrisy.

The choice of books set seems dictated by two main considerations ; firstly, the text must not be too long, owing to the fruitlessly detailed study required, and, secondly, it must be free from 'difficult' or 'embarassing' matter. Thus, a comparatively small proportion of Shakespeare's plays are ever set. *Macbeth* is the only one of the great tragedies to appear regularly in the School Certificate syllabus, though *Hamlet* and *Lear* appear fairly often, and *Antony and Cleopatra* occasionally in Higher School and Inter Arts (bowdlerized versions, of course). And when any other really reputable author appears, it is usually in an abbreviated version—for instance, Swift was represented by an expurgated edition of the first two books of *Gulliver's Travels*.

Obviously, if the present set book system is to continue, as it probably will, some reforms should be pressed for. There is no reason, except inertia, why it should continue, but there are one or two things that could be done to improve the usefulness of the paper. The first sounds simple, but would be, in practice, very difficult—that is to ensure that the members of the examining

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body responsible for choosing the books should have some ability to pick out works worth studying, and thus prevent the criminal waste of time involved in a close examination of *Poems of To-day*, for instance. Secondly, the present close study of three shortish works could be replaced by a general, critical reading of more or longer works, questions being set on their literary merit, structure and style. Of course, the teacher must be prepared to explain all references, but a reasonable amount of general knowledge can usually deal with these. At least, under this system, no undue stress would be placed on mere exposition, as is inevitable with the highly-marked context question looming ahead. I can see no real objection to this—the foci of study would be shifted to more important points, and the work could be dealt with more quickly and, in any valid sense, more thoroughly.

Assuming that some changes are possible within the syllabus, the most desirable one in its effect upon the whole of the English teaching in the school and in its preparation for advanced course work, would be the replacing of the present précis and set books papers by two papers involving simple exercises in practical criticism and appreciation, including précis (some rather tentative steps are being taken in this direction by some examining bodies), and some general knowledge of English literature, with, perhaps, special reference to a few illustrative texts of undisputed importance. (I am aware that there is a ' General Literature ' paper set as an alternative, but it is run on exactly the same lines as the set books paper, and can be answered satisfactorily by anyone who has read *The Golden Treasury* and Peacock's *Selected English Essays*, and who has an acquaintance with two or three of the most familiar classics).

A change of this nature would, I think, have salutary effects on English teaching in the lower forms where, at present, grammar and composition is, all too frequently, supplemented merely by close study of two or three ' readers ' or popular classics. It is true that there are few school books that lend themselves to the teaching of appreciation in junior forms, but an excellent one has just appeared in Messrs. Auden and Garrett's *The Poet's Tongue* and, the academic ice having been broken, it may be assumed that others will plunge in. As regards the teaching of general literature, any master with an intelligent interest in his subject should find it easy to draw up a suitable outline which certainly

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

need not be historical, in the first instance, though this approach may be very helpful. I have not yet discovered a published outline which can be of any use, though it is possible that one exists.

By the time the pupil of average intelligence had taken his Certificate he might, working to a syllabus of this kind, be assumed to have some share of critical ability, a general idea of his native literature, and some acquaintance with its chief figures, instead of departing into the world with no literary knowledge beyond a hazy recollection of a few miscellaneous texts.

Of course, the problem would be, by no means, solved by just carrying out these suggestions. The possibility of a really intelligent practical criticism paper being set, for instance, is small; even those set by experts at the Universities are often quite muddled in their aims and expression. But, assuming an intelligent board of examiners—and any suggestions must be dependent on this assumption—I feel that something would be done to make the School Certificate less of a clog and cumbrance than it is at present. Any system by which a year or more's work in a subject is tested in a few hours, and no account taken of the examinee's previous work, must be unfair, and merely patching up the present system could be desiderated only as a temporary measure. But the fact remains that something should be done immediately to stop the thing that is the crown of the ordinary boy's education from being, in its most important subject, foolishly and viciously anti-educational.

FRANK CHAPMAN.

EDITORIAL NOTE:

The case against the present system of Examinations was put, with representative evidence and a wealth of documentation, in the *Scrutiny of Examinations* that was printed in *Scrutiny* for September, 1933. The *Manchester Guardian* remarked in a leader that here was a case that would have to be answered. No attempt at answering has anywhere been made, though the Editors received many congratulatory letters from educationists, and one Headmaster asked for permission to re-print the *Scrutiny of Examinations* for distribution. Some copies of the issue containing it are still left, and may be obtained from Messrs. Deighton, Bell, and Co., Trinity Street, Cambridge.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TRAGIC PHILOSOPHY

IN comparing a passage from *Macbeth* with one from the *Paradiso*, Mr. T. S. Eliot tells us that poetically the two are equally good, but that the philosophy in Shakespeare is inferior. By what standard, I am tempted to ask, may the poetic value of different types of poetry in different languages be declared equal? By the equal satisfaction, perhaps, that fills the critic's mind? But the total allegiance of a mature person, his total joy in anything, can hardly be independent of his developed conscience and his sense for ultimate realities. He cannot be utterly enchanted by what he feels to be trivial or false. And if he is not utterly enchanted, how should he recognize the presence of the supremely beautiful? Two passages could hardly be pronounced equal in poetic force if the ultimate suggestions of the one were felt to be inferior to those of the other.

Admitting, then, that poetry expressing an inferior philosophy would to that extent be inferior poetry, we may ask this further question: In what respect other than truth may philosophies be called inferior or superior? Perhaps in being more or less poetical or religious, more or less inspired? Sometimes a philosophy may spring up imaginatively, and in that sense may be inspired rather than strictly reasoned or observed, as the myths of Plato are inspired ; but nobody would call such inspired philosophy *superior* unless he felt it to spring from the total needs and total wisdom of the heart ; and in that case he would certainly believe, or at least hope, that this superior philosophy was true. How then should the poetic expression of this inspired philosophy not be conspicuously superior as poetry, and more utterly enchanting, than the expression of any other philosophy?

Let me postpone generalities, and turn to the passages in question.

Lady Macbeth is dead. Macbeth foresees his own end. All the prophecies flattering his ambition have been fulfilled, and after the mounting horror of his triumph he stands at the brink of ruin. Surveying the whole in a supreme moment, he consents to his destiny.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> Tomorrow, and tomorrow and tomorrow
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
> To the last syllable of recorded time ;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life's but a walking shadow ; a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more. It is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

Mr. Eliot says that this philosophy is derived from Seneca ; and it is certain that in Seneca's tragedies, if not in his treatises, there is a pomp of diction, a violence of pose, and a suicidal despair not unlike the tone of this passage. But would Seneca ever have said that life signifies nothing? It signified for him the universal reign of law, of reason, of the will of God. Fate was inhuman, it was cruel, it excited and crushed every finite wish ; yet there was something in man that shared that disdain for humanity, and triumphed in that ruthless march of order and necessity. Something superior, not inferior, Seneca would have said ; something that not only raised the mind into sympathy with the truth of nature and the decrees of heaven, but that taught the blackest tragedy to sing in verse. The passions in foreseeing their defeat became prophets, in remembering it became poets ; and they created the noblest beauties by defying and transcending death.

In Seneca this tragic philosophy, though magnificent, seems stilted and forced ; it struts rhetorically like an army of hoplites treading down the green earth. He was the last of ancient tragedians, the most aged and withered in his titanic strength ; but all his predecessors, from Homer down, had proclaimed the same tragic truths, softened but not concealed by their richer medium. Some of them, like Virgil, had rendered those truths even more poignant precisely by being more sensitive to the loveliness of perishable things. After all, the same inhuman power that crushes us, breeds us and feeds us ; life and death are but two aspects of the same natural mutation, the same round of seed-time and harvest. And if all human passions must be fugitive, they need not all be unamiable: some are merry in their prime,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and even smile at their own fading. An accident of ritual led the ancients to divide tragedy sharply from comedy ; I think it has been a happy return to nature in modern dramatists and novelists to intermingle the two. Comic episodes abound in the most tragic experience, if only we have the wit to see them ; and even the tragic parts are in reality relieved by all sorts of compensations that stimulate our sense of life and prompt us to high reflection. What greater pleasure than a tear that pays homage to something beautiful and deepens the sense of our own profundity?

Not every part of this classic philosophy re-echoes in the pessimism of Macbeth. Shakespeare was not expressing, like Seneca, a settled doctrine of his own or of his times. Like an honest miscellaneous dramatist, he was putting into the mouths of his different characters the sentiments that, for the moment, were suggested to him by their predicaments. Macbeth, who is superstitious and undecided, storms excessively when he storms ; there is something feverish and wild in his starts of passion, as there is something delicate in his perceptions. Shakespeare could give rein in such a character to his own subtle fancy in diction and by-play, as well as in the main to the exaggerated rhetoric proper to a stage where everybody was expected to declaim, to argue, and to justify sophistically this or that extravagant impulse. So at this point in *Macbeth*, where Seneca would have unrolled the high maxims of orthodox Stoicism, Shakespeare gives us the humours of his distracted hero ; a hero nonplussed, confounded, stultified in his own eyes, a dying gladiator, a blinded lion at bay. And yet intellectually—and this is the tragedy of it—Macbeth is divinely human, rational enough to pause and survey his own agony, and see how brutish, how insignificant, it is. He sees no escape, no alternative ; he cannot rise morally above himself ; his philosophy is that there is no philosophy, because, in fact, he is incapable of any.

Shakespeare was a professional actor, a professional dramatist ; his greatness lay there, and in the gift of the gab: in that exuberance and joy in language which everybody had in that age, but he supremely. The Renaissance needed no mastering living religion, no mastering living philosophy. Life was gayer without them. Philosophy and religion were at best like travels and wars, matters for the adventurer to plunge into, or for the dramatist

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to describe ; never in England or for Shakespeare central matters even in that capacity, but mere conventions or tricks of fancy or moods in individuals. Even in a Hamlet, a Prospero or a Jacques, in a Henry VI or an Isabella, the poet feels no inner loyalty to the convictions he rehearses ; they are like the cap and bells of his fools ; and possibly if he had been pressed by some tiresome friend to propound a personal philosophy, he might have found in his irritation nothing else to fall back upon than the animal despair of Macbeth. Fortunately we may presume that burgherly comfort and official orthodoxy saved him from being unreasonably pressed.

That which a mastering living philosophy or religion can be, we may see at once by turning to the passage from Dante. In the lowest circle of Paradise, that of the inconstant moon, dwells the spirit of Piccarda, a lady who, having once been a nun but having been carried off and married by force, when later she became a widow preferred to continue her life in the world rather than return to her convent. Dante asks her if those who dwell in this part of Heaven ever desire to go higher, so as to see more and to love more. And she replies, No: for the essence of religious love is union with the order of creation. Perfect happiness would be impossible, if we were not perfectly happy in what God has given us ; and in his will is our peace.

Frate, la nostra volontà quieta
Virtù di carità, che fa volerne
Sol quel ch'avemo, e d'altro non ci asseta
Se disiassimo esser più superne,
Foran discordi li nostri disiri
Dal voler di colui che qui ne cerne ;
Che vedrai non capere in questi giri,
S'essere in carità è qui necesse,
E se la sua natura ben rimiri.
Anzi è formale ad esto beato esse
Tenersi, dentro a la divina voglia,
Per ch'una fansi nostre voglie stesse ;
Si che, come noi sem di soglia in soglia
Per questo regno, a tutto il regno piace
Com' a lo re ch'a suo voler ne invoglia.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

E'n la sua volontade è nostra pace:
Ell'è quel mare al qual tutto si move
Ciò ch'ella cria e che natura face.
Chiaro mi fu allor come ogni dove
In cielo è paradiso, etsi la grazia
Del sommo ben d'un modo non vi piove.

I questioned at the beginning whether the poetic value of unlike things could be pronounced equal: and if now I compare this whole passage with the passage from *Macbeth* I find that to my sense they are incommensurable. Both are notable passages, if that is all that was meant; but they belong to different poetic worlds, appealing to and developing different sides of the mind. And there is more than disparity between these two worlds; there is contrariety and hostility between them, in as much as each professes to include and to subordinate the other, and in so doing to annul its tragic dignity and moral finality. For the mood of Macbeth, religion and philosophy are insane vapours; for the mood of Dante, Macbeth is possessed by the devil. There is no possible common ground, no common criterion of truth, and no common criterion even of taste or beauty. We might at best say that both poets succeed in conveying what they wish to convey, and that in that sense their skill is equal: but I hardly think this is true in fact, because in Shakespeare the medium is rich and thick and more important than the idea; whereas in Dante the medium is as unvarying and simple as possible, and meant to be transparent. Even in this choice passage, there are stretches of pure scholastic reasoning, not poetical at all to our sensuous and romantic apprehension; yet the studious and rapt poet feels himself carried on those wings of logic into a paradise of truth, where choir answers choir, and everything is beautiful. A clear and transparent medium is admirable, when we love what we have to say; but when what we have to say is nothing previously definite, expressiveness depends on stirring the waters deeply, suggesting a thousand half-thoughts, and letting the very unutterableness of our passion become manifest in our disjointed words. The medium then becomes dominant: but can this be called success in expression? It is rather success in making an impression, if the reader is impressed; and this effect seems essentially incomparable with that of pure lucidity and tireless

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exact versification in one chosen form. To our insecure, distracted, impatient minds, the latter hardly seems poetry.

Voltaire said that Dante's reputation was safe, because nobody read him. Nowadays that is hardly true ; all superior persons read him a little, or read a great deal about him. He sets tempting problems for professional critics and antiquarians, and he appeals to archaistic taste, that flies for refuge into the fourth dimension, to everything that seems pure and primitive. But as living poetry, as a mould and stimulus for honest feeling, is Dante for us at all comparable to Shakespeare? Shakespeare, in passages such as this from *Macbeth*, is orchestrated. He trills away into fancy: what was daylight a moment ago, suddenly becomes a candle: we are not thinking or reasoning, we are dreaming. He needs but to say ' all our yesterdays,' and presently the tedium of childhood, the tedium of labour and illness, the vacancy of friendships lost, rise like vague ghosts before us, and fill us with a sense of the unreality of all that once seemed most real. When he mentions ' a poor player ' we think at once of the poet himself, because our minds are biographical and our sympathies novelesque ; we feel the misery and the lurid contrasts of a comedian's life ; and the existence that just now seemed merely vain, now seems also tempestuous and bitter. And the rhythms help ; the verse struts and bangs, holds our attention suspended, obliges our thoughts to become rhetorical, and brings our declamation round handsomely to a grand finale. We should hardly have found courage in ourselves for so much passion and theatricality ; but we bless Shakespeare for enabling us still to indulge in such emotions, and to relieve ourselves of a weight that we hardly knew we were carrying.

Nothing of the sort in the Italian: the simplest language, the humble vernacular, made pungent and to us often obscure only by an excess of concision and familiarity, or by allusions to events then on everybody's tongue. Dante allows his personal fortunes and hatreds to crop out in many places, perhaps quickening the interest of the modern gossip-loving reader. Yet these are incidental indiscretions, which the poet's own conscience might have regarded as blemishes. His work as a whole, and in intention, is that of a consecrated mind. A single thread of thought guides him ; the eye is focussed on pure truth, on human wills illustrating the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

divine laws against which they profess to rebel ; hell in the heart of earth, and earth enveloped in celestial harmonies. No occasion, as in modern edifying works, to avoid mentioning things unpleasant or to explain them away. Every detail is noted, not bashfully or apologetically but with zest ; when anything is wicked, its wickedness is exhibited and proved for our instruction. We learn the scientific complexity of the moral world, all plain facts, demonstrable truths, principles undoubted and certified. Mastered and chastened by this divine dispensation, what need should we feel of verbal opulence or lurid rhetoric? Not one rare epithet, not one poetic plum ; instead, a childlike intellectual delight in everything being exact, limpid, and duly named, and dovetailed perfectly into everything else. Each word, each rhyme, files dutifully by in procession, white verses, three abreast, like choristers, holding each his taper and each singing in turn his appointed note. But what sweetness in this endless fugue, what simple exactitude, what devout assurance ; and how unanimously these humble voices, often harsh and untutored if taken singly, rise together into a soaring canticle! The poetry, you might say, of industrious children, careful to make no mistake, but having nothing of their own to say, or not daring to say it. And indeed Dante's mind is busy, learned, and intense ; exact even in allegory, as in a sort of heraldry ; yet this very minuteness and pedantry are the work of love. Never was heart more tender or subtle or passionate ; only that its intensity is all turned towards metaphysical joys, and transferred to an inward spiritual heaven.

I doubt whether either the beauty or the weakness of such poetry can be understood without understanding the nature of religion, as neither religious people nor irreligious people are likely to do ; not the irreligious, because of insensibility, and not the religious, because of delusion. Still, a disinterested student, say of the origins of Christianity, ought to understand. Religion is not essentially a supplement to common knowledge or natural affection on the same level as the latter: it is not essentially a part of rational life, adjusted however gropingly to cosmic or social influences, and expressing them and their effects. Religion is rather a second life, native to the soul, developed there independently of all evidence, like a waking dream: not like dreams coming in sleep and composed largely of distorted waking impressions,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but an autonomous other life, such as we have also in music, in games, and in imaginative love. In religion the soul projects out of her own impulses, especially when these are thwarted, the conditions under which she will regard herself as living. If she needs salvation, she will posit a saviour ; if the thought of death offends her, she will posit resurrection or even immortality ; if she is troubled at the injustice of fortune, she will posit previous crimes or original sins of her own, to explain her misery. If in general she wishes to impose her will where she is impotent, she will utter that will in prayers or imprecations, and posit an invisible power inclined to listen, and able to help.

Now such an inner fountain of life and thought is evidently akin to poetic inspiration. As in poetry, so in religion, imagination evokes a more or less systematic invisible world in which the passions latent in the soul may work themselves out dramatically. Yet there are differences. The profane poet is by instinct a naturalist. He loves landscape, he loves love, he loves the humour and pathos of earthly existence. But the religious prophet loves none of these things. It is precisely because he does not love them that he cultivates in himself, and summons the world to cultivate, a second more satisfying life, more deeply rooted, as he imagines, in the nature of things. Earthly images therefore interest him only as symbols and metaphors, or as themes for denunciation. He is hardly a poet in the ordinary sense, except in so far as (like Milton, for instance) he may owe a double allegiance, and be a profane poet altogether when he is a poet at all. Religion is often professed and intellectually accepted without ever having flowered in the soul, or being suspected to have any kinship with poetry. It may have withered into a forced and angry metaphysics or semi-political party doctrine, poetically deplorable.

The opposite is the case in Dante, whose poetry is essentially religious, as his religion is essentially poetical. We are in the presence of an overpowering inspiration, become traditional, become also learned and quasi-scientific, but still kindled by moral passion and fertile in poetic ideas. The Hebrew prophets had begun by denouncing that which was and proclaiming that which should be ; but that which should be could evidently never become actual without a miracle and a total revolution in the world ; so that prophecy turned to eschatology and to expectation of a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Messiah. At this point pagan streams of inspiration began to mingle with the Hebraic stream. Perhaps the Messiah had already come. Perhaps he was to be no conquering monarch, but a god in disguise. Perhaps he had been crucified, as the spirit is always crucified. Perhaps his kingdom was not of this world. Were there not reports that Jesus, who had been crucified, had been seen, risen from the dead? Would he not surely come again with glory in the clouds of heaven? Transfigured by this new spiritual faith, many current legends and maxims were ascribed to Jesus, and beautifully set down in the Gospels. The fathers worked out the theology. The saints repeated the miracles and explored all the phases of ascetic and mystical experience. Nothing remained but for Dante, with exquisite fidelity and minuteness, to paint a total picture of the Christian universe. The whole substance of that universe was poetry ; only the details could threaten to become prosaic ; but this danger was removed, in the more important places, by Dante's extraordinary sensitiveness. He had had a revelation of his own in childhood, interrupted later by the false glare of the world, but finally restored in the form of religious wisdom and consecration. The fresh dew of poetry and love trembled upon everything. Indeed, for our modern feeling the picture is too imaginative, too visionary, soaked too much in emotion. In spite of the stern historical details, when we rub our eyes and shake off the spell, the whole thing seems childishly unreal. We can understand why Mr. Eliot feels this to be a ' superior ' philosophy ; but how can he fail to see that it is false?

Inspiration has a more intimate value than truth and one more unmistakably felt by a sensitive critic, since inspiration marks a sort of spring-tide in the life of some particular creature, whereas truth impassively maps the steady merciless stretches of creation at large. Inspiration has a kind of truth of its own, truth to the soul ; and this sincerity in intuition, however private and special it might be, would never conflict with the truth of things, if inspiration were content to be innocently free and undogmatic, as in music or lyric poetry. The inmost vegetative impulses of life might then come to perfect flower, feeling and celebrating their own reality without pretending to describe or command reality beyond, or giving any hostages to fortune. But unfortunately animals

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cannot long imitate the lilies of the field. Where life is adventurous, combative and prophetic, inspiration must be so too. Ideas, however spontaneous, will then claim to be knowledge of ulterior facts, and will be in constant danger of being contradicted by the truth. Experience, from being lyrical, will become tragic ; for what is tragedy but the conflict between inspiration and truth? From within or, as we may fancy, from above, some passionate hope takes shape in the mind. We fall in love or hear a voice from heaven ; new energies seem to leap up within us ; a new life begins crowding the old life out, or making it seem dreary or wicked. Even when inspiration is not moral, but merely poetical, it kindles a secret fire and an inner light that put vulgar sunshine to shame. Yet not for long, nor for ever ; unless we passionately shut ourselves up in the *camera obscura* of our first inspiration, and fear the darkness of other lights. The more profound and voluminous that first inspiration was, the more complete at last will be our astonishment and despair. We shall cry with *Le Cid*:

> Percé jusques au fond du coeur
> D'une atteinte imprévue aussi bien que mortelle . . .
> Je demeure immobile, et mon âme abattue
> Cède au coup qui me tue.

Tragedy must end in death: for any immortality which the poet or his hero may otherwise believe in is irrelevant to the passion that has absorbed him. That passion, at least, dies, and all he cares for dies with it. The possibility of ulterior lives or alien interests destined in future to agitate the world makes no difference to this drama in this soul ; and the mention of those irrelevant sequels to this ruin, and to this tragic acceptance of ruin, would tinkle with a ghastly mockery at this supreme moment, when a man is entering eternity, his measure taken, his heart revealed, and his pride entire.

These considerations may help us to understand why Shakespeare, although Christianity was at hand, and Seneca, although a Platonic philosophy was at hand, based like Christianity on moral inspiration, nevertheless stuck fast in a disillusioned philosophy which Mr. Eliot thinks inferior. They stuck fast in the facts of life. They had to do so, whatever may have been their private religious convictions, because they were dramatists

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

addressing the secular mind and concerned with the earthly career of passionate individuals, of inspired individuals, whose inspirations contradicted the truth and were shattered by it. This defeat, together with a proud and grandiloquent acceptance of it, is final for the tragic poet. His philosophy can build only on such knowledge of the world as the world can give. Even in the seventeenth century, when Christian orthodoxy was most severe, most intellectual, and most dominant, also most courtly and presentable to the worldly mind, Christianity was nevertheless strictly banished from the stage, except in a few expressly religious plays written for young ladies. Both Christian and pagan personages talked and felt throughout like thoroughly unregenerate mortals. To have allowed religion to shift the scenes, override the natural passions of men, and reverse the moral of the story, would have seemed an intolerable anti-climax.

Nor does even Dante, who calls his vision a comedy, really escape this tragic reality. Existence is indeed a comedy, in that it is a series of episodes, each blind and inconclusive, though often merry enough, but all having their justification beyond themselves, in a cosmic music which they help to make without knowing it. Nonetheless, the individual souls in Dante's hell and heaven speak the language of tragedy, either in desperate pride or in devout self-surrender. In either case, in eternity, they have no further hopes, fears, or ambitions. Their lives *there* are simply the full knowledge of what their lives had been *here*. If the *Divine Comedy* had not had in it this sublime note of recollection, if it had attempted to describe new adventures and fanciful Utopias succeeding one another *ad infinitum*, it would not have been divine at all, but only a romantic medley like the second part of *Faust*. In Dante the hurly-burly is rounded out into a moral tale, into a joyful tragedy, with that sense of finality, of eternity, which Christian eschatology had always preserved.

I can think of only one tragedy in which religion might well play a leading part, and that is the tragedy of religion itself. The point would be to show that a second life of pure inspiration, freely bred in the soul out of moral impulses, must sooner or later confront the cold truth. The illusions then surrendered would not lose their poetic value, since their source would remain alive in the soul; and the element of deception involved might disappear insensibly,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as it did in paganism, yielding with a good grace to an impartial philosophy. Such a philosophy need not be in the least hostile to inspiration. There is inspiration wherever there is mind. The sensuous images and the categories of thought on which common knowledge relies are themselves poetic and wholly original in form, being products of a kind of inspiration in the animal organism. But they are controlled in their significance and application by experiment in the field of action. Higher fictions are more loosely controlled by the experience of the heart. They are less readily revived or communicated. They flare up into passionate prophecies, take themselves for revealed truths, and come more often to a tragic end.

G. SANTAYANA.

REVALUATIONS (IX):

KEATS

THE excuse for writing at the present day on Keats must lie not in anything new to be said about him, but in a certain timely obviousness. The current placing of him seems, in essentials, likely to stand: what a critic may still propose to himself is a sharper explicitness; a recall, that is, to strict literary criticism. For Keats has become a symbolic figure, the type of poetic genius, a hero and martyr of poetry, with claims to a greatness such as can hardly at any time have, for the devout, invested the symbolic Chatterton; and there is a general consensus that the greatness is a matter of promise and potentiality rather than achievement. The stress falls on the poetry that Keats might have written and the Letters. It is salutary then, to remind ourselves, not only that Keats's poetry, the poetry he actually wrote, was a major influence in the nineteenth century, but that in its qualities, in what it actually is, must reside the chief grounds for a high estimate of his potentialities.

So stated, the last proposition would seem to be axiomatic. Yet there is a common tendency to shirk literary criticism; to prefer, where creative genius is in question, some freer and looser

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

approach, as if relevance were an easy matter, and by evading the chief relevant discipline one could attain to delicacy and inwardness. Evasion, especially in a case like that of Keats, can be comparatively subtle and plausible. Mr. Middleton Murry tells us of his *Keats and Shakespeare*:

> 'It is no part of the purpose of this book to appreciate Keats's poems objectively as poetry; its concern is solely to elucidate the deep and natural movement of the poet's soul which underlies them.' (p. 129).

Mr. Murry's purposes are his own; but even without a knowledge of the book one ought to see dangers in this sentence: the elucidations of a poet's soul that are not controlled by the literary critic's attention to poetry will hardly, whatever they may be worth, turn out to be concerned wholly, or even mainly, with the soul of the poet. And that in fact something is badly wrong in Mr. Murry's book—false in its relations to both Keats and Shakespeare—may be most simply established by quoting a complementary sentence:

> 'He was twenty-three; and at the moment he wrote this letter he was writing day after day the *Odes*, to Psyche, to the Nightingale, on a Grecian Urn, on Melancholy—poems comparable to nothing in English literature save the works of Shakespeare's maturity.' (p. 143).

Wrongness of this kind in criticism, such extravagant falsity in the appreciation of 'poems objectively as poetry,' clearly cannot be, or go with, rightness about the poet's soul. And Keats's genius, we find, is not really illuminated by the procedure of *Keats and Shakespeare* or, except as another of Metabiology's cloudy trophies, exalted.

From Mr. Murry it is well to turn to a very different admirer of Keats, a critic who, concerned avowedly with poetry first and last, pronounces:[1]

> 'He was not troubled about his soul, or any other metaphysical questions, to which he shows a happy indifference, or rather, a placid unconsciousness.'

[1]Arthur Symons, *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry*.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Symons, of course, speaks as a representative of the last phase of the Victorian tradition that had its main poetic source in Keats. According to Mr. Symons,

> 'Keats, at a time when the phrase had not yet been invented, practised the theory of art for art's sake. He is the type, not of the poet, but of the artist. He was not a great personality, his work comes to us as a greater thing than his personality. When we read his verse, we think of the verse, not of John Keats.'

The last sentence gets its peculiar force from the context: there is more than one kind of impersonality in art, and what Mr. Symons intends is sufficiently plain. Keats, he tells us, 'accepted life in the spirit of art'; he is the artist 'to whom art is more than life.'

Few people to-day find Mr. Symons's view of Keats acceptable, yet of the poems up to the revised *Hyperion* his might reasonably be found a more acceptable account than Mr. Murry's. It nevertheless, we know, will not do. Mr. Symons no doubt perceives that Keats is a greater poet than Tennyson and Rossetti, but in what way, by what virtue, he cannot adequately suggest: the essential differences between Keats's 'art' and theirs cannot be accounted for in terms of 'art' as conceived by the 'nineties (for the conception is none the less limiting for being incapable of satisfactory definition). The Odes and even *The Eve of St. Agnes*—the consummate works acclaimed by Mr. Symons as exemplars of 'art for art's sake'—transcend the appreciation of the 'æsthetic' taste that, with justice, finds them congenial. To try and enforce this judgment with some particularity would seem to be a promising approach to Keats.

Let us consider the *Ode to a Nightingale*, commonly placed highest among the Odes, and determine in what ways, though it is not of the supreme order to which Mr. Murry assigns it, it is a finer and more vital thing than appreciation in terms of 'art for art's sake' can easily suggest. In memory it might at first not seem to transcend very notably Mr. Symons's terms. Indeed, it might on re-reading seem to be very fairly describable as the work of a 'purely sensuous poet,' one who was 'not troubled about his soul'; for the pang in it has little to do with moral or spiritual stress, but is, like the swooning relapse upon death,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

itself a luxury. ' Luxury,' in fact, is a key-word in the description; ' lovely ' (the beauty is of that kind), ' enchanting,' ' lush ' and ' exquisite ' are others. One remembers the poem both as recording, and as being for the reader, an indulgence. Yet (unless the present critic's experience is exceptional) memory tends to be unjust by simplifying: re-read, the poem turns out to be subtler and finer than careless recollection suggests. And to describe and discuss this fineness there is no need to invoke the Letters ; it can be discussed as a fineness of art. In fact, using this term ' art ' in a way that would seem to Mr. Symons right and natural, one can show Keats to be in the *Ode to the Nightingale* a better artist than Mr. Symons appreciates.

> ' With Shelley, even though he may at times seem to become vague in thought, there is always an intellectual structure ; Keats, definite in every word, in every image, lacks intellectual structure. He saw words as things, and he saw them one at a time.'

And, we may recall, A. C. Bradley, a quite different kind of critic, appears to contemplate a serious comparison between the *Ode to a Nightingale* and Shelley's *To a Skylark*.[1] Now if intellectual structure is what Shelley characteristically exhibits, the *Ode to a Nightingale* may freely be allowed to lack it. But the superiority of the Ode over *To a Skylark*, which beside it appears a nullity, is not merely a superiority of details (' words ' and ' images ' seen and felt ' one at a time '). The rich local concreteness is the local manifestation of an inclusive sureness of grasp in the whole. What the detail exhibits is not merely an extraordinary intensity of realization, but also an extraordinary rightness and delicacy of touch ; a sureness of touch that is the working of a fine organization. The Ode, that is, has the structure of a fine and complex organism : whereas *To a Skylark* is a mere poetical outpouring, its ecstatic ' intensity ' being a substitute for realization in the parts and for a realized whole to which the parts might be related.

The Ode, it has been said above, tends to suffer an unfair simplification in memory ; the thought of its being ' rich to die,'

---

[1] *Oxford Lectures*, p. 228.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the desire

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,

tend to stand for more of it than they should. Actually, when we re-read it we find that it moves outwards and upwards towards life as strongly as it moves downwards towards extinction ; the Ode is, in fact, an extremely subtle and varied interplay of motions, directed now positively, now negatively. Consider the opening stanza :

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk :
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

It starts Lethe-wards, with a heavy drugged movement (' drowsy,' ' numb,' ' dull ') down to ' sunk.' The part played by the first line-division is worth noting—the difference the division makes to the phrase ' a drowsy numbness pains my sense.' In the fifth and sixth lines, with the reiterated ' happy ' the direction changes, and in the next line comes the key-word, ' light-wingèd.' The stanza now moves buoyantly towards life, the fresh air and the sunlight (' shadows numberless ')—the thought of happy, self-sufficient vitality provides the impulse. The common medium, so to speak, in which the shift of direction takes place with such unobtrusive effectiveness, the pervasive sense of luxury, is given explicitly in the closing phrase of the stanza, ' full-throated ease.'

Down the throat (now the poet's) flows, in the next stanza, the ' draught of vintage,'

Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,

the coolness (having banished the drowsy fever) playing voluptuously against the warmth of ' the warm South.' The sensuous luxury keeps its element of the ' light-wingèd ' : there are the ' beaded bubbles winking at the brim.' This second stanza reverses

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the movement of the first ; until the last two lines it moves towards life and the stirring human world,

Dance and Provençal song and sunburnt mirth.

But the optative ' O ' changes direction, as if with the changing effect (now no longer excitation) of the wine, and the stanza ends on the desire to

leave the world unseen
And with thee fade away into the forest dim.

The next stanza is the only one in the poem to be completely disintoxicated and disenchanted. It is notable how at the second line the tone, the manner of reading compelled on one, alters, turning from incantatory into prosaic matter-of-fact:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret,
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan ;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies . . .

—That ' spectre-thin ' is a key-word, suggesting as it does, along with ' gray,' the thin unreality of the disintoxicated, unbeglamoured moments that the addict dreads.

The fourth stanza takes up the ' away ' again—but not the ' fade ' :

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy . . .

—It points now, not to dissolution and unconsciousness but to positive satisfactions, concretely realized in imagination: they represent the world of ' Poesy ' (for poetry was Poesy to the Keats of *Endymion* and the Odes). We have now the rich evocation of enchantment and delighted senses, and here again the touch of the consummate artist manifests itself ; in the very piling up of luxuries a sure delicacy presides:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The grass, the thicket and the fruit-tree wild ;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine . . .

—the ' grass,' the ' thicket ' and the cool reminders of the English spring bring the needed note of freshness into the else too cloying accumulation of sweets.

And now comes a stanza that, in the simplifying memory, tends to get undue prominence:

Darkling I listen ; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath ;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still thou wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

—In the re-reading the force of that ' half ' comes home to us: Keats is strictly only half in love with death, and the positive motion is present even in this stanza. It is present in the ' rich ' of ' rich to die,' a phrase that epitomizes the poem. The desire not to die appears in the thought of becoming a sod to the nightingale's high requiem and of having ears in vain, and it swells into a strong revulsion against death in the opening lines of the next stanza:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down . . .

Bridges, as a conscientious critic, solemnly points out the fallacy here: ' the thought is fanciful or superficial—the man being as immortal as the bird,' etc. That the thought is fallacious witnesses, of course, to the intensity of the wish that fathered it. Keats entertains at one and the same time the desire to escape into easeful death from ' the weariness, the fever and the fret '—

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,

and the complementary desire for a full life unattended by these disadvantages. And the inappropriateness of the nightingale's song as a symbol of enduring satisfaction—

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The voice I hear this parting night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn

manifests locally the complexity of the impulsions behind the poem. The regressive desire to ' cease upon the midnight ' slips, it will be noticed, into the positive nostalgia represented by Ruth, the association of the two providing an interesting illustration to D. W. Harding's *Note on Nostalgia*.[1]

Bridges has also a criticism to make against the opening of the final stanza: the ' introduction,' he says, is ' artificial,' by which he would seem to suggest that Keats, having earlier in the Ode got his transition, managed his development, by picking up a word or a phrase already used, now mechanically repeats the closing ' forlorn ' of the penultimate stanza because he can think of no better way of carrying on:

The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

VIII

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.

Actually, that the repetition has a peculiar and appropriate force is obvious, or would be if Keats had not here suffered the injury incidental to becoming ' hackneyed.' In ' faery lands forlorn '—the adjective has acquired the wrong kind of inevitability ; it would but for the hackneying, but for the groove in one's mind, be seen to be, coming with the final emphasis at the end of those two glamorous lines, unexpected. It is so for Keats ; he turns it over, and it becomes as he looks at it the recognition upon which the poem ends—the recognition that we, looking back, can see to have been approaching in the passage about Ruth, ' sick for home,'

[1] *Determinations* (ed. by the present writer) ; see esp. p. 68.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which gives us the sickness to contemplate, not the home: even the illusion of a ' secure happiness ' as something to be ecstatically, if enviously, contemplated in the nightingale is recognized to be an evanescent indulgence, belonging to the world of ' magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas.' The song that fades away is no longer an ecstasy, but a ' plaintive anthem.'

The strength of the Ode, then, is far from being merely the strength of details—of things seen separately. In fact, the Ode is not only incomparably better art than Mr. Symons recognizes ; it is better in a way involving a relation to life that the prescription ' art for art's sake ' (whatever it may mean) would not tend to encourage. On the other hand, to talk of the Ode as belonging to the same order as the work of Shakespeare's maturity is extravagantly out. It is not for nothing that it should suffer as it does in memory, or that it should not be among the poems that bear frequent re-reading. It is as if Keats were making major poetry out of minor—as if, that is, the genius of a major poet were working in the material of minor poetry. For in spite of a subtlety so far transcending the powers of the not much younger poet who wrote of ' pleasant smotherings,' the word for poetry (or Poesy) as practised by the poet of the Ode is still ' luxury.' The pain with which his heart aches is not that of a moral maturity, of a disenchanted wisdom born of a steady contemplation of things as they are ; it is itself a luxury. The disintoxicated third stanza represents the actual upon which the poems turns its back, seeking deception. Though ' the fancy cannot cheat so well as she is famed to do,' the ' sole self,' plaintively yearning, can make of its very regret a sweet anodyne.

In fact, the main impulsion of the *Ode to a Nightingale* is essentially of the same order as that exhibited more simply by the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*. The urn, with its ' leaf-fringed legend,' gives a firmer stay to fancy than Keats could make of his imagined light-winged Dryad of the trees in its melodious plot of beechen green:

> Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
> Are sweeeter . . .

—They are less disturbing, if less intensely felt. The compensation for the lack of rich immediacy is the idyllic serenity of the fourth

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stanza, with its ' green altar ' and its ' peaceful citadel.' But even here we are made aware of a price to be paid. The serenity, before the end of the stanza, takes on another quality:

> Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
> To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
> Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
> And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
> What little town by river or sea shore,
> Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
> Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?

That ' emptied ' is a key-word: we end the stanza contemplating, not the scene of ideally happy life, but the idea of streets that

> for evermore
> Will silent be,

and of a town to which

> not a soul to tell
> Why thou art desolate can e'er return.

The victory over time seems an equivocal one. The attempt to get it both ways could, in the nature of things, have only a very qualified success.

Getting it both ways—the poem essentially *is* that. The bargain with life and time proposed in the second stanza—

> those unheard
> Are sweeter

and

> Bold lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
> Though winning near the goal—yet do not grieve ;
> She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
> For ever wilt thou love and she be fair!

—the implicit bargain is within half-a-dozen lines of this forgotten:

> More happy love! more happy, happy love!
> For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
> For ever panting, and for ever young ;
> All breathing human passion far above,
> That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and daz'd,
> A burning forehead and a parching tongue.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—In what way ' All breathing human passion far above '? 'Warm' and ' panting '—the accordant ditty would be very decidedly to the ' sensual ear.' Clearly, the urn for Keats is the incitement and support to a day-dream ; the dream of a life that, without any drawbacks, shall give him all he desires—shall be for ever warm and still be enjoyed, remaining, ' among the leaves,' free from all the inevitable limitations that the nightingale, the light-winged Dryad, has never known.

These observations are not offered as proof of any remarkable percipience. The excuse for them is the puzzled, awed or Delphic attention that, in spite of their obviousness, has been paid to the famous concluding pronouncement of the Ode—the subtleties and profundities it still provides occasion for.

> ' Beauty is truth, truth beauty '—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

This surely in the context just examined, should cause no metaphysical tremors of excitement or illumination, and need no great profundity or ingenuity of any kind to elucidate it. The proposition is strictly in keeping with the attitude concretely embodied in the poem. The use of the word ' truth ' corresponds strictly to the attitude towards reality analysed above. Life alas! isn't as we would have it ; but it ought to be, and, with the aid of the Grecian urn, can be felt for a moment to be: imagination, concentrating on the beauty of the urn and ignoring the discordant and indocile facts, attains a higher reality, compared with which actual life seems thin and unreal. By the last stanza imagination in Keats has flagged, has relapsed from its inspired dream, the enchantment has waned and the actual has reasserted itself ; but although the ' leaf-fringed legend ' is now a ' Cold Pastoral,' it remains there, a permanent incitement to warm imaginings of an ideal life, a purely beautiful reality.

To show from the Letters that ' Beauty ' became for Keats a very subtle and embracing concept, and that in his use the term takes on meanings that it couldn't possibly have for the uninitiated, is gratuitous and irrelevant. However his use of the term may have developed as he matured, ' beauty ' is the term he used ; and in calling what seemed to him the supreme thing in life 'beauty' he expressed a given bent—the bent everywhere manifested in the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quality of his verse, in its ' loveliness.' His concern for beauty meant, at any rate in the first place, a concentration upon the purely delightful in experience to the exclusion of ' disagreeables.' And that ' beauty ' in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* expresses this bent is plain—that it should is the essence of the poem, and there is nothing in the poem to suggest otherwise.

When, then, the devotees of Art and Beauty later in the century made creedal or liturgical use of Keats's

' Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'

they were not falsifying its spirit (though it is one thing for him to say it, another thing for them to say it after him). They had at any rate gone the way it pointed, and it is worth while recalling briefly where they arrived. The Pre-Raphaelite cult of Beauty, which developed into the religion of Art (or the æsthetic religiosity), is the completest expression of that Victorian romanticism which, in poetry, draws so much on the Keats of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *The Eve of St. Mark* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Victorian poetry in the central line that runs from the early Tennyson through Rossetti to Mr. Symons and his associates of the 'nineties turns its back on the actual world and preoccupies itself with fantasies of an alternative—in a spirit very different from Shelley's, for the Victorian poetic day-dream does not suppose itself to have any serious relation to actuality or possibility. Tennyson, of course, knows there is something wrong about ' the Palace of Art,' and aspires vaguely (the poem named is a curious and revealing document) to become a serious poet. But the more sophisticated (and lesser) talent, making a virtue—or religion—of its incapacity, cherishes its otherworldliness as a spiritual distinction, and invests it, as if to make it serious, with religiose solemnity. There is a certain unction of cult about Keats's devotion to beauty, and in his ' temple of delight,' we remember, ' veil'd Melancholy ' has her ' sov'ran shrine ' also. But in reading Rossetti, who has none of Keats's magnificent vital energy, we are assisting at devotions—æsthetic-religiose devotions. There is a sacred hush, and an effect of candles or of light through stained glass, of swinging censers and of rites before a veiled altar. The poetic otherworld has been turned into a higher reality in the most effectual of ways: ' Life is ritual.'

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

So beauty is made truth, truth beauty—for Lionel Johnson's phrase is his equivalent for Keats's. But if life is ritual, the beauty that Johnson and Rossetti worship has (we are moved to frame the corollary) little to do with life—and little life in it. Imputing his favourite virtues to a favourite saint (Charles I) Johnson says, characteristically:

> And art to him was joy.

That may fairly be taken as the Aesthetic equivalent of

> A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.

The difference is characteristic. Keats may be an æsthete, and he may contemplate, among other 'things of beauty,' a Grecian urn or a Titian, but even then his joy would be better described as being in 'life' (the word 'art' could not have been used by Keats—or by any one of his time—in Johnson's way). The difference between joy in 'art' and joy in 'life,' is, of course, not so plain as the antithetical use of the two words would suggest; but the point just made about Keats may be enforced by recalling that the urn, for him, becomes alive ('warm' and 'panting') and that out of the Titian bursts, in *Endymion*, that glowing triumph of Bacchus, with its irresistible rush of joyous energy:

> Like to a moving vintage down they came,
> Crown'd with green leaves, and faces all on flame . . :

Keats's æstheticism, in short, does not mean any such cutting off of the special valued order of experience from direct, vulgar living ('Live!—our servants will do that for us') as is implied in the æsthetic antithesis of Art and Life.

Nevertheless, a certain drawing of frontiers, a wilful delimitation of the 'true' or 'real' in experience, a focussing of the vision so as to shut out the uncongenial, is essentially the purpose of Keats's worship of Beauty—a purpose such as, uncountered and persisted in, must, we feel, necessarily result in devitalization. Actually, we feel also that there is in the poetry of this Keats, in the very richness and vitality with which he renders his 'exquisite sense of the luxurious,' an inherent contradiction: so strong a grasping at fulness of life implies a constitution, a being, that could not permanently refuse completeness of living.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Aestheticism as intensity of living was what, of course, the Victorian devotees of Art and Beauty, of the religious cult of the senses, were apt to preach. We remember the credo of the religion, the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* (it is through Pater that the line passes from Rossetti to the Aesthetes of the 'nineties):[1]

> 'Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?
>
> To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life . . . While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion . . . stirring of the sense, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or the face of one's friend . . . With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch.'

—'O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts.' But the contrast with Keats is as apparent as the community. Pater may talk of burning always with a hard gemlike flame, but there is nothing answering in his prose; it notably lacks all sensuous vitality. Indeed, to point to Pater's prose—cloistral, mannered, urbane, consciously subtle and sophisticated and actually monotonous and irresponsive in tone, sentiment and movement (the eyelids always a little weary)—is a way of giving force to the judgment that for the Victorian æsthete art is something that

---

[1] 'This Chiaro dell' Erma was a young man of very honourable family in Arezzo; where, conceiving art almost, as it were, for himself, and loving it deeply, he endeavoured from early boyhood towards the imitation of any objects offered in nature. The extreme longing after a visible embodiment of his thoughts strengthened as his years increased, more even than his sinews or the blood of his life; until he would feel faint in sunsets and at the sight of stately persons'—The likeness of this prose (it is the opening of Rossetti's *Hand and Soul*) to Pater's is significant.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gets between him and life. (A closely related judgment is that Victorian romantic poetry is ' literary ' as Keats's is not). Nevertheless, we can see why Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthete should have looked to Keats as they did: we can ourselves see in Keats (if we can see more too) the great Aesthete—the one Aesthete of genius. For all his unique vitality and creative power, we can see him as related to them by those significantly associated traits which Pater presents: the devotion to exquisite passion and finest senses, the religiose unction of this æstheticism, the cherished pang of transience. And even in Wilde's vulgarization of Pater's prose we can be reminded that Keats's use of the Grecian urn represents a regular Aesthetic habit—one that is intimately associated with the traits just mentioned:

> ' On that little hill, by the city of Florence, where the lovers of Giorgione are lying, it is always the solstice of noon, of noon made so languorous by summer suns that hardly can the slim naked girl dip into the marble tank the round bubble of clear glass, and the long fingers of the lute-player rest idly upon the chords. It is twilight always for the dancing nymphs whom Corot set free among the silver poplars of France. In eternal twilight they move,' etc.

But the effect of this insisting on the Aesthete in Keats is merely to bring out still more the extraordinary force of his genius. There is, for instance, the *Ode to Melancholy*, which represents one of the most obviously decadent developments of Beauty-addiction—of the cult of ' exquisite passion ' and ' finest senses.' The penalties of the addiction—the ' heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,' the ' aching pleasure . . . turning to poison,' the besetting fret of transience—are themselves turned into a luxury, a peculiarly subtle drug. The Ode is, as it were, the prescription. The process is of the same order as that by which his Victorian successors (' world-losers and world-forsakers ') made of their sense of defeat and impotence a kind of religious sanction—turned it into an atmosphere of religious desiderium:

> Nothing: the autumn fall of leaves.
> The whole year sets apace

—the tone pervades the work of this line from *Mariana in the*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Moated Grange onwards. But Keats's *Ode on Melancholy*, a prescription for making the most of your 'sorrow's mysteries' (if you go to Lethe or make your rosary of yew-berries you drown the wakeful anguish of the soul), exhibits with peculiarly paradoxical force in the inculcation of these perverse and debilitating indulgences—it is his most Swinburnian mood—his characteristic vitality.

Paradoxical the manifestation of this vitality in the second stanza very plainly deserves to be called:

> But when the melancholy fit shall fall
> Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
> That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
> And hides the green hill in an April shroud . . .

—the fresh touch when it comes is so welcome after the heavy drugged luxury of the first stanza that one does not immediately recognize the purely formal nature of the simile, which passes only by a curious sleight or bluff. Keats's melancholy attracts no doubt both the 'weeping' and the 'cloud' quite naturally; but it is not, as the poem conveys it, at all like the sudden rain that refreshes the flowers. For the 'pale forehead' of the addict it has no such virtue. Its quite opposite effect is given us at the end of the Ode:

> His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
> And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

The sudden burst of freshness is, as it were, the vitality behind Keats's æstheticism breaking through. It leads on to the contrasting and very characteristic manifestation of vitality that follows:

> Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
> Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
> Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
> Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows . . .

In the strength that makes the luxury of this more than merely voluptuous we have that which makes Keats so much more than a mere æsthete. That 'glut,' which we can hardly imagine Rossetti or Tennyson using in a poetical place, finds itself taken

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up in ' globed,' the sensuous concreteness of which it reinforces ; the hand is round the peony, luxuriously cupping it. Such tactual effects are notoriously characteristic of Keats, and they express, not merely the voluptuary's itch to be fingering, but that strong grasp upon actualities—upon things outside himself, that firm sense of the solid world, which makes Keats so different from Shelley. Because of it Mr. Symons is able to say of him, justly:

> ' Keats has a firm common sense of the imagination, seeming to be at home in it, as if it were literally of this world, and not of another.'

—It is, we may add, by virtue of this strength, which is at once intelligence and character, that Keats never takes his dreams for reality or (even with the Grecian urn to help him) remains lost in them. This strength is one with that which makes him put *La Belle Dame sans Merci* aside—abandoned for the Victorian romantics to find in it the essential stuff of poetry, and which makes him condemn *Isabella* as ' mawkish ' and say:

> ' in my dramatic capacity I enter fully into the feeling ; but in Propria Persona I should be apt to quiz it myself. There is no objection of the kind to *Lamia*—A good deal to *St. Agnes Eve*—only not so glaring.'[1]

The strength appears here as critical intelligence, something intimately related to the sureness of touch and grasp that makes his art in the Odes so much better than Mr. Symons recognizes. It is the strength that is manifested in the extraordinary rapidity with which that art developed between *Endymion* and the *Ode to a Nightingale*.

The relation between the firmness of the art and the firm grasp on the outer world appears most plainly in the Ode *To Autumn*. Of this Mr. Middleton Murry says:

> ' It is the perfect and unforced utterance of the truth contained in the magic words: " Ripeness is all." '[2]

Such talk is extravagant, and does not further the appreciation of Keats. No one could have found that order of

---

[1]Letter to Woodhouse, 22nd September, 1819.
[2]*Keats and Shakespeare*, p. 189.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

significance in the Ode merely by inspecting the Ode itself. The ripeness with which Keats is concerned is the physical ripeness of autumn, and his genius manifests itself in the sensuous richness with which he renders this in poetry, without the least touch of artistic over-ripeness.

If one might justifiably call the poem Shakespearian it would be in emphasizing how un-Tennysonian it is—how different from the decorative-descriptive verse to which we see it as pointing forward. The explicit richness of detail has its life in the vigour of the medium:

> To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,
> And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core ;
> To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
> With a sweet kernel . . .

That 'moss'd cottage trees' represents a strength—a native English strength—lying beyond the scope of the poet who aimed to make English as like Italian as possible. So too with the unpoetical 'plump': its sensuous firmness—it introduces a tactual image—represents a general concrete vigour such as is alien to the Tennysonian habit, and such as a Tennysonian handling of the medium cannot breed. This English strength pervades the Ode ; in another of its forms it is notably exemplified by this, from the second stanza:

> And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
> Steady thy laden head across a brook . . .

In the step from the rime-word 'keep,' across (so to speak) the pause enforced by the line-division, to 'Steady' the balancing movement of the gleaner is enacted.

The warm richness of the poem is qualified, as with the autumnal hint of sharpness in the air, by the last stanza, which, from 'the stubble plains' (appropriately unvoluptuous in suggestion) onward is full of the evocation of thin sounds—the gnats 'mourn' in a 'wailful choir,' the lambs bleat, hedge-crickets sing, the redbreast 'with treble soft' whistles, and gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

If, then, in Keats's development from *Endymion* to the *Ode to Autumn* we see, as we may (leaving aside for a moment the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hyperions) the promise of greatness, it does not lie in any effective presence of the kind of seriousness aspired to in *Sleep and Poetry*:

> And can I ever bid these joys farewell?
> Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,
> Where I may find the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts . . .

It lies rather in the marvellous vitality of the art that celebrates 'these joys'—in the perfection attained within a limiting æstheticism. Remarkable intelligence and character are implied in that attainment, especially when we consider the starting-point and the surrounding influences: the beginning in 'pleasant smotherings,' with, as the incitement towards discipline, such poetic models as are represented by Leigh Hunt and the Cockney taste (at the highest level:

> Spenserian vowels that elope with ease
> And float along like birds o'er summer seas).

The achieved art itself, as has been argued, implies paradoxically, in the consummately kept limits of its perfection, something more serious than mere æstheticism.

> 'While a great deal is made of æsthetic sensibility and its refinements, we hear very little about moral sensibility. It is ignored; and the deep-seated spiritual vulgarity that lies at the heart of our civilization commonly passes without notice.'

—That exquisitely sure touch which refines and lightens Keats's voluptuousness cannot, we are convinced, go with spiritual vulgarity (an argument notably relevant to the *Ode to Psyche*, about the sensuous loveliness of which there is nothing oppressive, cloying or gross). In the place—it is the Preface to *The Root and the Flower*—from which comes the sentence just quoted, Mr. Myers also says:

> 'When a novelist displays an attitude of æsthetic detachment from the ordinary ethical and philosophical preoccupations of humanity, something in us protests . . . '

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—Something in the poet protested, we know. ' Scenery is fine,' he wrote in a letter, ' but human nature is finer.' Also:

> ' I find earlier days are gone by—I find that I can have no enjoyment in the world but continual drinking of knowledge. I find that there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good to the world . . . The way lies through application, study, and thought. I will pursue it, and for that end purpose retiring for some years. I have been hovering for some time between an exquisite sense of the luxurious, and a love for philosophy—were I calculated for the former, I should be glad. But as I am not, I shall turn all my soul to the latter . . . '[1]

By the date of the *Ode to Autumn*, of course, this resolution, this maturer bent in Keats for which the Letters are so remarkable, had taken effect in poetry: the revised *Hyperion*, in fact, had just been abandoned. It is ironical that the first result of the effort to bring his profoundest moral and philosophical concerns into poetry—to deal with

> the agonies, the strife
> Of human hearts

—should have been something deserving to be called, with a pejorative implication, ' art ' as nothing does that he had written before. Mr. Middleton Murry's explanation seems reasonable: Keats, against his conscious aim, was led to cultivate an ' abstract ' Miltonic art by the overmastering impulse to evade reality—reality made intolerable by the sufferings of his brother. In any case, Keats's own judgment upon the first *Hyperion* is clear:

> ' I have given up *Hyperion*—there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful, or rather, artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations. English ought to be kept up.'[2]

This was to Reynolds. To his brother George he had written:

> ' I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me. Miltonic verse cannot be written

---

[1] 28th April, 1818.
[2] 22nd September, 1819.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but is [as?] the verse of art. I wish to devote myself to another verse alone.'[1]

The verse of the first *Hyperion*, if not merely Miltonic, is decidedly a ' verse of art.'

> One moon, with alteration slow, had shed
> Her silver seasons four upon the night,
> And still these two were postured motionless,
> Like natural sculpture in cathedral cavern ;
> The frozen God still couchant on the earth,
> And the sad goddess weeping at his feet:
> Until at length old Saturn lifted up
> His faded eyes, and saw his kingdom gone,
> And all the gloom and sorrow of the place,
> And that fair kneeling Goddess ; and then spake,
> As with a palsied tongue, and while his beard
> Shook horrid with such aspen-malady:

That is a very qualified Miltonic—Miltonic as transformed by a taste for ' Spenserian vowels that elope with ease ' (the ease of this verse is languorous and luxurious). We note, both in the presentment of what the verse describes and in the poet's attitude towards the verse, what may be called a decorative preoccupation. The attitude towards the verse, the handling of the medium, reminds us strongly of Tennyson:

> Until at last old Saturn lifted up
> His faded eyes, and saw his kingdom gone,
> And all the gloom and sorrow of the place,
> And that fair kneeling Goddess

[1]21st September, 1819. I take over the emendation ' as ' from Mr. Murry. Keats has said just before: ' The *Paradise Lost*, though fine in itself, is a corruption of our language. It should be kept as it is, unique, a curiosity, a beautiful and grand curiosity, the most remarkable production of the world ; a northern dialect accommodating itself to Greek and Latin inversions and intonations.'

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—that is plainly very close to

> The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
> Moans round with many voices

and

> One seem'd all dark and red—a tract of sand,
> And some one pacing there alone,
> Who paced for ever in a glimmering land,
> Lit with a low large moon.

Hyperion, in fact, offers a good way of bringing home the predominance of Milton—a Milton associated with Spenser—in the poetry of the nineteenth century, for Tennyson represents the Victorian main current.

If the first *Hyperion* is impersonal, it is impersonal in one of the wrong ways. Keats's art does not tap the vigour either of his æstheticism or of the more serious interests, the maturer moral life, revealed to us in the Letters; no rich sap flows. In the revising, his main operation was an attempt to graft the poem on to his maturer personality—for that is what the use of Moneta, in the added induction, amounts to:

> 'My power, which to me is still a curse,
> Shall be to thee a wonder; for the scenes
> Still swooning vivid through my globed brain,
> With an electral changing misery,
> Thou shalt with these dull mortal eyes behold,
> Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not.'

But this mode of presentment—of introduction, rather—makes no difference to the ensuing narrative, which remains, but for some mechanical changes in phrasing and word-order, what it was. The new life is confined to the three hundred added lines of induction, which, however, suffice for a conclusive effect.

To talk of 'new life' in this verse may perhaps seem paradoxical, for what strikes one at once about it, compared with the verse of the first *Hyperion*, is a kind of inertness: it lacks entirely the epic (if rather languid) buoyancy, the Miltonic wave-motion, the onward-carrying rise and fall. And it is not merely quite without any suggestion of the Tennysonian; even when it most suggests the Keats of the Odes it is without poetical aura—unbeglamoured and unintoxicated:

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

No Asian poppy nor elixir fine
Of the soon-fading jealous Caliphat ;
No poison gender'd in close monkish cell
To thin the scarlet conclave of old men,
Could so have rapt unwilling life away.

This exemplifies well enough the characteristic movement—' inert ' only by comparison and in immediate effect, while the ear has not yet dropped the habit of expectancy brought away from the first version. The new verse moves line by line, the characteristic single line having, as it were, an evenly distributed weight—a settled, quite unspringy balance. It is this peculiar rhythmic character that had led one to divine, as an influence in this technical development, a study of Dante in the Italian (Cary could have hardly have had much to do with so extraordinary a change as that represented by the new verse compared with the earlier). And, at the moment of writing, that guess gets something very like confirmation in a letter from Professor Livingston Lowes to the *Times Literary Supplement* (January 11th, 1936), in which he shows, in impressive detail, that the influence of Dante (of the *Purgatorio* in especial) upon the induction to *The Fall of Hyperion : a Vision* ' is both deeper and more extensive than has apparently been observed.'

Dante, of course, for Keats was not a technical study, and was something more than literature. What the strength of the influence, the intensity of the effect, shows is how much the study was part of the discipline and self-searching with which Keats met the disasters, the blows of fate, that were making life for him overwhelmingly a matter of ' the agonies, the strife of human hearts.' The immediately personal urgency of the preoccupation with suffering and death comes out plainly in the passage describing his nightmare race against the burning of the ' gummed leaves ' (ll. 106-134). But this personal urgency is completely impersonalized ; it has become the life, the informing spirit, of the profoundest kind of impersonality. There is no element of self-pity—nothing at all of the obliquely self-regarding—about the attitude of the famous lines

' None can usurp this height,' returned that shade,
' But those to whom the miseries of the world
Are misery, and will not let them rest.'

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was, in the Romantic Period, the æsthete who achieved so un-Byronic and so un-Shelleyan a note in the contemplation of human suffering—the æsthete no longer an æsthete. There is no afflatus here, no generous emotionality. The facts, the objects of contemplation, absorb the poet's attention completely ; he has none left for his feelings as such. As a result, his response, his attitude, seems to us to inhere in the facts, and to have itself the authenticity of fact. The strength that makes the sensuous Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* so different from the spiritual Shelley's *To a Skylark*—the grasp of the object, the firm sense of actuality, the character and critical intelligence implied (we have seen) in the artist's touch and his related command of total effect—now manifests itself in the field of tragic experience. His own acute and inescapable distresses, including the pain of watching helplessly the suffering of persons dear to him, he can, without feeling them the less, contemplate at the same time from (as it were) the outside, as objects, as facts ; and the contemplation of the inevitable and endless human suffering to which his more immediately personal experience leads him has a like impersonal strength. This profound tragic impersonality has its concentrated symbolic expression in the vision of Moneta's face:

> And yet I had a terror of her robes,
> And chiefly of the veils, that from her brow
> Hung pale, and curtain'd her in mysteries,
> That made my heart too small to hold its blood.
> This saw that Goddess, and with sacred hand
> Parted the veils. Then saw I a wan face,
> Not pined by human sorrows, but bright-blanched
> By an immortal sickness which kills not ;
> It works a constant change, which happy death
> Can put no end to ; deathwards progressing
> To no end was that visage ; it had past
> The lilly and the snow ; and beyond these
> I must not think now, though I saw that face—
> But for her eyes I should have fled away.
> They held me back with a benignant light,
> Soft-mitigated by divinest lids
> Half-closed, and visionless entire they seem'd
> Of all external things—they saw me not,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> But in blank splendour, beam'd like the mild moon,
> Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
> What eyes are upward cast.

The ' comfort ' does not derive from any latent goodwill or sympathy imagined to reside in the ultimate nature of things—for Keats there are no Demogorgons ; it is that paradoxical strengthening—sense of ability to endure—which rewards the full recognition of necessity. But these are empty abstract words: the poetry is concrete in its complexity and unmistakable in its effect. It is clearly the expression of a rare maturity ; the attitude is the product of tragic experience, met by discipline, in a very uncommonly strong, sincere and sensitive spirit.

The *Ode to Autumn* was composed immediately on the abandonment of the revised *Hyperion*. It represents the repose—the ' comfort '—earned. Its easy objectivity can now be seen to be related to the tragic impersonality of the Moneta passage. The moral and spiritual discipline in the background make possible this serenity (though the Ode itself does not say, in the sense implied by Mr. Murry, ' Ripeness is all '). And that the Ode, being what it is, should come when it does confirms the account given above of the relation between Keats's sensuousness and his seriousness, his capacity for rapid development.

The induction to the revised *Hyperion*, then, justifies the high estimate of Keats's potentialities. It shows the interests of the Letters realized—become active—in technique: poet and letter-writer are at last one. The verse is convincing, and the symbolism is organic with it. The symbolic theme is extremely impressive and, though it invites elucidation and commentary, conveys its essential significance at once.

Keats, as has been so generally agreed, was beyond any doubt gifted to become a very great poet—though no sufficient reason appears to have been given for supposing that he might have written great poetic plays.

F. R. LEAVIS.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

POST OBITUM

(DIAGHILEFF, PAVLOVA).

BALLET is exhibiting a phase of growing popularity ; it has become the veritable vogue of the moment. New ballet companies are eagerly acclaimed, and numerous writings on the subject continue to appear. The latest event has been a gala performance of the film of Pavlova's life and her art (' The Immortal Swan '), and in the near future a memorial to her is to be erected. Yet, in spite of the recognized importance of ballet as an art form, it appears to be drowned in a sea of sentimental slush. Misguided by undeveloped criticism, the public is incapable of differentiating between great artistic revelations and mediocrities. It is time to stop this cheap publicity of Pavlova's swans in her Hampstead garden, Sarah Bernhardt's lions, Ida Rubinstein's tigers and Miss So and So's monkeys. The less said about Pavlova's pets, the greater the homage paid to the Immortal Swan. The value of art has nothing to do with the private life of the artist. It is futile to speak, as some critics do, of Pavlova's modesty[1] or other virtues, apart altogether from the fact that this view betrays a lack of psychological insight—for we know that most of the great artists are not devoid of vanity, jealousy and envy, which, however, does not depreciate their value as artists ; even the great apostle of non-resistance to evil, Tolstoy, confessed to possessing these only too human weaknesses.

Furthermore, the critics are inclined to confuse the art of execution with that of creation. Anna Pavlova, one of the greatest *ballerine assolute*, was incapable of creating (except by interpretation) not only choreographies[2] but even solo dances for herself, although she was incomparable as a creative executant in some of them. It is, therefore, preposterous to over-estimate her value in comparison with the Diaghileff seasons. Mr. H. G., writing about Pavlova in *The Observer* of January 12th, quotes Mr. Arnold Haskell: ' The particular quality that she had has, of course, to

[1]H.G. quoting Mr. Arnold Haskell in *The Observer* of January 12th.
[2]With the exception of *Autumn Leaves*—a complete failure.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be left as "indefinable." But it is interesting that the two great ballet critics of the time, Svetloff and André Levinson, appraised her in almost exactly the same terms: They both said that they would rather see one minute of her at her best than the whole of a Diaghileff season.' We have an unpublished typescript by Valerian Svetloff (kindly lent by Col. Korotkevitch, C.B.E., of Russian Books and Library), entitled *Tamara Karsavina*. Let us quote from it and see how it contradicts the above quotation: 'The real revolution in the Russian ballet has been made by Diaghileff and Fokine, who have overthrown the steadfastness of its traditions and dragged it out of the depths of the routine in which it had been helplessly perishing . . . Karsavina—ballerina of the Russian Renaissance of ballet, which has been awakened to a new life by the creative works of *maîtres de ballet*, painters, composers and artistes, united by the inspired and stubborn initiative of Diaghileff whose performances in the best London and Paris theatres have effected a real revolution, overthrowing the whole old system and inveterate regime of the dying plastic art.'

As for Levinson, one of the best of all genuine ballet critics, he made criticism an art. He had a perfect knowledge of the technique of the dance, and knew how to translate it into literary images, but some of his views are outlived, retrograde and even dangerous to the development of ballet as a living art form. If he ever made the unpardonable mistake of saying that he preferred to see one minute of Pavlova at her best to the whole of a Diaghileff season, it must have been due to his confusion of the art of individual non-creative artists with the art of ballet as a whole—a confusion of an inspired execution of the works of art not only with their creation, but also with a creative spirit that unites the various arts into the harmonious ensemble which makes a perfect ballet. If he preferred a glimpse of Pavlova to the genius of Diaghileff together with all the great creative minds who worked for him he committed a crime against æsthetic judgment, the crime of condemning the new era initiated by Diaghileff in the world of international art.

Let us see how André Levinson arrived at this unjustified attitude. He said that Fokine sacrificed the classical dance to music, painting and *décor*, the result of which was *un spectacle d'art*, magnificent and composite, but one where the dancer played

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an auxiliary role ; that Diaghileff in his research and struggle made use of the dance rather than rendered a service to it, that he constantly subordinated the choreography to the exigency of his preferred arts ; that only Pavlova escaped from such a subjection. He accuses Diaghileff of having adulterated the traditional classical style of the Russian ballet, made of it an art for exportation and presented it to Western Europe as a fictitious forced image, variegated with factitious exoticism in which the dance was amalgamated with mime and served only as a pretext for the display of the *décor* or as an impetus to the music.

André Levinson lends his support to pure classical ballet, a form which we also admire. But why should we regard this as superior to other forms? This attitude is just as absurd as insisting on classical music and painting and underestimating the value of modern composers and painters. Who can prove that *Esméralda* after Perrot or *Bayadère* by Petipa are greater than the *Polovtsien Dances* from *Prince Igor* or than *Petrouchka*, which he called a musical pantomime? His views are, obviously, inconsistent: he recognized that the *Polovtsien Dances* are not only an acme of Russian national art, a prodigious achievement, but his expert eye also detected behind this barbarous evocation of Fokine, under its seemingly chatoyant asymmetry and dionysian frenzy, a steel mechanism of the traditional school, an equilibrium, a learned progression of choreographic composition, a spiritual culture and muscular discipline—in spite of the fact that this masterpiece, in its national character, passionate swing and choreographic amplitude, deviates further from classicism than most of Diaghileff's ballets. On the other hand, he fails to appreciate fully Diaghileff's as well as Fokine's and Massine's achievements, which are equally apparent in their other creations. We agree with André Levinson's condemnation of dilettantism—duncanism,[1] eurythmics, expressionism and Mittel-Europa movements (Wigmannism, Labanism, Joosism, etc.), all of which oppose inspired improvisation to the

[1]Not one of Duncan's followers can ever acquire the quality in which her original, unique personality manifested itself. Mistaken for an art-form, she was in reality a beautiful phenomenon of Nature, doomed to die without leaving an enduring spiritual discipline.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rigorous logic of style ; but his argument loses its value when it is directed against non-classical ballet forms which have been created by choreographers brought up in the classical tradition and which are executed by classically-trained dancers, as in Diaghileff's and Col. de Basil's companies. *Quod licet Jovi non licet Bovi !*

From one point of view, indeed, André Levinson is right: Diaghileff did not show ' the purest of Russian glories ' ; the pure and complete classical ballet at its best, as it was and still is being danced in Russia, has not been seen in Western Europe, except for *The Sleeping Beauty*, produced in London in a highly perfected form in 1921, with Trefilova, Spessivtzeva and Egorova.[1] But it was certainly not Pavlova who remained quite faithful to classical tradition. What about her ballets inspired by Oriental art? And after all, was not her Swan created by Fokine, whom André Levinson accused of having adulterated the pure classical style? Is it true then that Diaghileff and Fokine sacrificed the dance to the other arts, was the prestige of virtuososhiip subordinated to poetical ends in *Le Spectre de la Rose*, as André Levinson affirms, and were the dancers of secondary importance in *Les Sylphides*? Svetloff sees in these two ballets neither mime nor dramatic subject, but an apotheosis of the dance saturated with the purest romanticism of classical style—the dance by which Maria Taglioni had conquered Europe and America. Diaghileff and Fokine specially created roles to show the individual dancers at their best, and Nijinsky would never have been revealed to us in all his magnificence as a dancer if it had not been for Diaghileff and Fokine, whose choreographic genius liberated the dance from the exaggerated restraints imposed upon it by the rigid classical school, and who inspired it with spiritual expression.

---

[1]Here is Svetloff's description of the traditional classical ballet: ' An insignificant subject spread over six or seven acts ; a series of classical and quasi-character dances presented as a long and tiresome divertissement ; solo numbers, *pas de deux*, *pas d'action* for the ballerina ; marches, processions and waltzes for the *corps de ballet* ; long mimic scenes put in here and there, chiefly in order to give a rest to the public and artistes ; a happy apotheosis for all (including the public).'

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But it is true that Diaghileff could not suffer to see the dance in an indifferent decorative frame or hear associated with it a mediocre orchestra. It is astonishing that André Levinson was not impressed by the fact that the most Pavlova ever succeeded in achieving in *mise en scène* was the pretty-pretty effect so dear to the philistine taste of the crowd. She shone in all her glory against the background of a provincial *ensemble* and a half-trained *corps de ballet*, whereas in Diaghileff's company practically every solo dancer was a member of the *corps de ballet*, and almost every member was capable of taking a part as solo dancer—and this even in the post-war years when his company was far from being composed of the best Russian dancers. There never was an impassable barrier between a ' star ' and the *corps de ballet*. Naturally in such an organization the laurels had to be shared ; and the biggest share went, of course, to Nijinsky. Here we have the most likely cause of the divergence of Pavlova's and Diaghileff's paths, and after the war his financial means did not permit him to invite her again. Serge Lifar writes about this: ' Il ne pouvait plus compter sur Nijinsky, retenu dans l'ombre par la maladie, ni sur la Pavlova que les moyens financiers de mon maître empêchaient de disputer à l'Australie ou l'opulente Amérique.'

Further reproaches have been made by André Levinson: he implies that although Diaghileff sacrificed the dance to *décor* he thereby defeated his own ends. In Levinson's opinion a painting which has become a *décor*, enlarged to the scale of the theatre, is reduced to an auxiliary function—the easel picture loses in depth and substance what it gains in surface. The only painter, he believes, who has escaped this depreciation by the theatre, this vulgarization which adds to fame but diminishes the value of the work of art, is Pablo Picasso. As far as we remember, Diaghileff used an enlarged reproduction of an easel picture only once—the *décor* of Barabau after Utrillo ; but as a rule the great painters who worked for him acted as decorative artists on such occasions, making designs especially intended for the stage and unmistakably meant to perform their specific function as decorative art for the theatre. André Levinson overlooked this and confused two different functions performed by the painters: easel painting and *décor*. His view, if logically developed, would lead to an absurd conclusion: the denial of decorative art in the theatre.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He then proceeds to astonish us further by his approval of the *décor* after an easel picture by Corot, as employed by Col. de Basil for *Les Sylphides*. Let us quote his words: ' Contrairement à ce qui était à craindre, la transposition de ce ballet dans un nouveau site, celui d'une toile de Corot, a fort bien réussi grâce aux pinceaux experts du prince Schervachidzé qui en repartit les plans sur la toile du fond et les portants.'[1] Surely Corot should have been left severely alone, even more so than Utrillo. One would have expected a more consistent and constructive criticism from André Levinson. He said about Diaghileff: ' Mais il ne se résigna jamais à vieillir avec son temps!' The trouble with André Levinson was that he himself became *un peu vieillot* too soon. Diaghileff used the right method, attaching equal importance to all the arts and uniting them in such a way that they reciprocally enhanced each other's beauty.

As to the elevation of Anna Pavlova on a pedestal in preference to all those great artists who revolved in Diaghileff's sphere, may we remind André Levinson's readers that all her qualities are in equal measure possessed by another great *ballerina assoluta*—Olga Spessivtzeva ; with this difference, however, that she has the superlative attribute of pure classical style, a fact which was admirably summed up by Diaghileff: ' Spessivtzeva est plus chaste.' Why do the lovers of pure classical art prefer to bathe their sweet memories in tears of sentimentality whilst watching films which record relics of the glorious past, instead of inviting the greatest living exponent of that art—Spessivtzeva? She would draw in space delicate designs imbued with the poetry of movement, of which she alone now possesses the secret ; she would evoke the art of Anna Pavlova, except for one image—the Swan, which belonged to Pavlova alone as the Rose belonged to Nijinsky.

VLADIMIR KAMENEFF.

---

[1]André Levinson. *Les visages de la danse.*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE TENDENCIES OF BERGSONISM

THE philosophy of Bergson has always provoked sharply contradictory opinions. Since his works are one long polemic against the belief that reality can be comprehended in intellectual terms, scientists, as one might have expected, have for the most part treated him with contempt. Even those thinkers, however, who are similarly opposed to the pretensions of science, and who might therefore be supposed to have some measure of agreement with Bergsonism, have been unable to form a balanced verdict as to what is true or false in his system of thought. According to his admirers he has triumphantly reasserted the reality of human freedom and the primacy of the spirit over matter ; William James, for example, hailed his appearance as one of the two chief turning-points of modern times. For his enemies, on the other hand, among whom have been included many who have been equally anxious to find some metaphysical sanction for human values, he is the subverter of the traditions of civilization, the champion of instinct against reason, of undisciplined spontaneity against wise self-control, of the sub-human against the truly spiritual.

An examination of Bergson's philosophy shows that both these opinions are partly true. If we analyse his premises and processes of reasoning, we find that he has genuinely reasserted certain data of man's moral consciousness, of a kind which science had tended to ignore ; but we find also that he has misinterpreted these data by means of false assumptions, in such a manner that the influence of his philosophy on his disciples is likely to be quite contrary to what Bergson himself seems to have intended. Any philosophical system is an attempt to rationalize some fundamental intuition, some basic way of reacting to the totality of the universe, which originates in the emotional temperament of the philosopher and which cannot be destroyed by intellectual argument. At the heart of Bergson's system is an intuition of the nature of the human personality, which is likely to command the assent of those who find the mechanistic materialism of science unsatisfying. Although, however, acceptance or rejection of the basic premise of a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

philosophy depends upon temperament rather than upon argument, we may criticize in intellectual terms the manner in which that premise is elaborated ; we may require that its creator should fully understand his own assumptions and that he should deduce from them a consistent interpretation of the data which he is required to treat ; and we may ask what modes of behaviour and of evaluation his philosophy is likely to encourage. Judged by these tests, Bergsonism as a system must be condemned.

The question whether the human will is free or predetermined has usually been discussed in metaphysical terms rather than on the basis of experience. Adoption of the metaphysics either of mechanistic materialism or of certain forms of religion, for example, implies that free will is an illusion. If, however, we consider the data of consciousness, we find that in our own lives we vary between two fundamentally different modes of behaviour ; and that while at one extremity our actions are clearly predetermined, at the other they appear to be free. For the greater part of the time we live only on the surface of ourselves, reacting mechanically to external stimuli and allowing our thoughts to be governed by habits of association. At such periods our behaviour could be predicted by an external observer who was in possession of the necessary information. Quite different is what happens when we are compelled to make some important decision, when we undergo some momentous experience which penetrates into the depths of our personality, or when we struggle to express ourselves in genuinely creative activity. We feel then that the different elements of our personality become united to produce a single response, and that the actions which result from this multiplicity in unity are different in kind from those which are caused by mechanical reactions and associations. There is thus a distinction between two kinds of activity: the kind in which the personality is dissociated into fragments and no free action is possible ; and the kind in which, as Bergson describes it, it ' concentrates itself into a point, or rather a sharp edge, pressed against the future and cutting into it unceasingly.' At such times, according to Bergson, ' life and action are free.' ' We are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work.' ' It is the whole soul, in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fact, which gives rise to the free decision ; and the act will be so much the freer, the more the dynamic series with which it is connected tends to be the fundamental self.' The distinction between these two kinds of activity is the foundation of Bergson's philosophy.

In formulating this distinction Bergson has expressed an important truth—a truth which is the basis of any sound morality. Man is a bundle of different urges which, through the extension of conscious self-control, must be harmonized and unified. We can, for example, illustrate the value of Bergson's conception of human nature by comparing it with that adopted by the psycho-analysts. The purpose of psycho-analysis is to cure inner conflicts between different emotional urges which have never been reconciled, and its method is to bring them to the level of consciousness—in Freudian terminology, to enable the ego to understand, and thereby to harmonize, the social requirements of the super-ego and the impulses which well up from the id. The unified and fully conscious personality at which psycho-analysis aims is the personality which, according to Bergson, acts freely.

Such a conception has metaphysical implications of a kind which conflict with the dogmas of mechanistic materialism. It implies that the human personality is more than the sum of its parts, and that when it acts as a unity its actions cannot be predicted. It implies also that the universe contains novelty as well as continuity, and that matter in some mysterious fashion has a tendency to become organized into entities which possess new qualities. Mechanistic materialism, on the other hand, was based on faith in the universal validity of laws of causation. Its more fanatical adherents regarded the universe as nothing but a complex of mechanical forces whose movements could be described in mathematical formulæ ; and they were in the habit of asserting that a complete knowledge of its condition at any one moment would enable one to predict its condition at any given future moment. If introspective evidence alone were used to disprove mechanism, such evidence might be regarded as delusive ; but there are objective facts which lead us also to the conclusion that the behaviour of wholes cannot be predicted from the study of their parts. Any organism, studied externally, is such a whole. Investigation of the brain processes of animals shows, for example,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that particular functions cannot be identified with particular parts of the brain ; if one part is atrophied, the functions formerly located there can often be assumed by some other part.

Considerations such as these must lead us to the conclusion that the intelligence, in the narrow sense of the word, cannot wholly apprehend reality. For in the first place its method is that of analysis ; instead of grasping entities as they really are, it breaks them up into their component parts, endeavouring to establish resemblances between the unknown and the already known. And in the second place its function is to discover causal relationships, and it must assume, in order to operate at all, that laws of causation are universally valid. If we are to know entities as they are in themselves, as wholes and as qualitatively unique, a different mental faculty must be employed. This faculty is, in Bergson's terminology, that of intuition. The exercise of intuition can be illustrated most clearly in the æsthetic experience, either of the creator or of the critic. It is the faculty which enables the creative artist to conceive a work in its totality, as a formal unity of different elements, and which enables his audience to grasp his intention. It is also the faculty which sometimes makes it possible for us to understand and sympathize with the character of another person, encountered in reading or in actuality. It is, according to Bergson, ' the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible.' And it is ' a simple act,' consisting of ' an indivisible apprehension,' whereas analysis may go on to infinity.

But although intuition is a genuine faculty, it is one which must be employed with caution ; nor is there any reason for postulating an opposition between the intuition and the intelligence. The apprehension of wholes and the analysis of them into parts are both necessary operations, which supplement each other. Intuition, moreover, being an act of the imagination, is something the validity of which must afterwards be checked by the intelligence. The artist may truly apprehend his own intention by an act of intuition, but when his audience re-interpret it within themselves or when we imaginatively project ourselves into the character of another person, there is no guarantee that knowledge so acquired actually corresponds to the objective reality unless

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it is afterwards verified by intellectual analysis—unless, for example, we find that we can actually prophesy the behaviour of the individual whom we have intuitively understood.

Nor can the intuition compensate for the inability of the intelligence to discover a universally applicable framework of causal relationships. Through intuition we may apprehend—or think that we apprehend, since even Bergson does not categorically assert that such an act is possible—an organic whole, but the causal laws which have brought that whole into existence can be discovered, if at all, only by the intelligence. And since the function of philosophy is to formulate the relationships which exist between the different entities in the universe, intelligence and not intuition is the proper instrument of the philosopher. How new organisms with new properties come into existence is a mystery which the intelligence cannot explain but which can still less be surmounted by intuition. If we cling to our faith in the universality of causation, then we cannot believe that genuine novelty is possible. We must postulate a divine creativity or, if we prefer to call ourselves materialists, some equally hypothetical law of dialectical development, religious in all but name, by which matter is moulded in accordance with ideas which are—or can be—preconceived. Alternatively we may admit that the scope of the human intelligence is limited, that actually we cannot understand the whole of reality, and that there is no *a priori* reason for assuming that we can.

Thus if we develop the two premises of the Bergsonian system—that of the distinction between the free activity of the united self and the determined activity of the dissociated self, and that of the distinction between the intuition and the intelligence, we conclude that the universe consists of entities, some of which are knowable, if at all, only by intuition, and between which there are relationships which the intelligence can discover. At certain points, however, there are discontinuities, the most conspicuous of which is that between organic matter and dead matter. We may, if we like, construct hypotheses which will bridge these gaps, but in so doing we must preserve a proper caution, remembering that to claim for a hypothesis the status of an observed scientific fact is the formula for fanaticism. A cosmology envisaged in such terms gives no encouragement to anti-intellectualism ; since anti-intellectualism begins not when we limit the scope of the intelligence

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but when we postulate some other method of acquiring knowledge by which those limits can be transcended.

The Bergsonian system, however, is very far from being a consistent development of the premises from which it originates. Instead of regarding intuition and intelligence as complementary to each other, Bergson erects an opposition between them, claiming for intuition the power of apprehending reality in its essence and regarding intelligence either as capable only of discovering truths of an inferior order or as actually delusive. And instead of holding firm to his original understanding of free activity, he misinterprets and misapplies it in such a manner that in their practical tendency his doctrines are an encouragement not to the unity of the self but to its dispersion.

The errors of Bergsonism are the result of a curious habit of thought which pervades the whole of Bergson's philosophy but which is never made explicit and of which Bergson himself seems to be unconscious. He persistently identifies the subject which knows with the object which is known. This identification is, of course, common to most modern philosophers, who, having been presented by Descartes with the problem of the apparent separation of mind and matter, have been compelled to seek some formula which should reunite them. In general, they may be divided into those who, starting with the existence of matter, have endeavoured to deduce mind from it ; those who have followed the reverse procedure ; and a third group who have interpreted both mind and matter as emergent from some neutral stuff. Whatever procedure they have chosen, however, philosophers have done so deliberately and consciously, and have therefore been aware of the dangers implicit in it ; they have realized, for example, that though in order to construct a comprehensible picture of nature the gulf between mind and matter must be bridged, the distinction between the act of awareness and the data of which we are aware must afterwards be admitted in some shape in order to account for the data of experience. Bergson's peculiarity is that though, like Berkeley and the German Idealists, his general tendency is to deduce matter from mind, he is himself unconscious of his own assumptions ; he protests, in fact, that he has postulated the separate existence both of matter and of mind. In reality, however, his system is monistic, with mind as usually the dominant

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

partner. If it is also dualistic—if, in fact, Bergson affirms a whole series of dualisms—matter and life, inertia and movement, space and time, perception and memory, intellect and intuition, and so on—this dualism has its origin not in any genuine separation between matter and mind but in the quite different distinction within the mind between the free activity of the united self and the determined activity of the dissociated self. This distinction is, as a result of Bergson's inveterate subjectivism and by a process of metaphor rather than of reasoned thought, projected into the objective universe and made the basis of a cosmology.

The most flagrant example of Bergson's identification of subject and object, and the chief source of his philosophical errors, is his treatment of memory. Memory is, as Bergson rightly perceived, a mysterious phenomenon, which constitutes one of the cardinal differences between what is living and what is dead. Living organisms are modified by the experiences which they undergo, and since every organism undergoes a different set of experiences, no two organisms are likely to behave exactly alike. As Bergson expresses it, ' wherever anything lives, there is, open somewhere, a register in which time is being inscribed.' Man, moreover, is not merely modified by his experiences, in the sense that he acquires learned reflexes ; he can also remember the past as past, he can recreate it in imagination. This faculty is one which cannot be regarded as purely physiological, although it is presumably emergent from physiological processes ; and as Bergson has demonstrated, it cannot be located in any particular part of the brain. Such facts constitute the chief, and apparently an insurmountable, argument for epistemological dualism. Bergson, however, with his bias towards monism, adopts a different explanation. From a common sense view it would appear that our awareness of the past must be different from the past of which we are aware, however we choose to explain the fact that we have acquired the capacity for this kind of awareness ; certainly it would not seem to imply that past events themselves survive into the present. This, however, is precisely what Bergson assumes. He regards time not as an abstraction from the fact that events occur before and after each other but as itself an entity or rather a movement, and he identifies it with memory. Real time, as distinct from ' mathematical time,' is ' duration,' and ' duration '

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is ' the continuous life of a memory which prolongs the past into the present.' ' This survival of the past *per se* forces itself upon philosophers,' he tells us. And if it is not the whole of the past but merely certain selected fragments from it which are present in consciousness at any one moment, it is not that the past has ceased to exist ; it is merely that our body finds it convenient, in order to act more successfully, only to admit into consciousness those aspects of it which are immediately useful.

Bergsonian ' duration ' is therefore a mysterious something which has at once the properties of time (as Bergson conceives it) and of memory. It is, like time, a constant flow, and yet, like memory, it grows, past events being gathered together as a snowball gathers snow. Like time, it is merely a movement, not a something which moves, and yet, like memory, it is a consciousness. Like time, it is a stream which has no beginning and no ending, and yet, like memory, it is the essential element which characterizes living organisms. By a farther confusion this strange and mythical monster is then interpreted in the light of Bergson's conception of free activity, with the result that it is finally metamorphosed into a spiritual and creative activity.

It will be agreed that the objects and images of which we are conscious are built up mainly from memories ; what immediate perception gives us at any one moment is negligible in comparison with what memory adds to our perceptions. When the personality becomes united into a whole, then the memories which it has at its command are incorporated into this whole ; the conscious self, considering what form of behaviour is appropriate to the situation in which it finds itself, can summon its recollections of past situations for enlightenment. The self which acts freely is therefore to a large degree compounded of memories. Once again, this does not mean that it is identical with its memories ; there is still a distinction between the subject which remembers and the events which are remembered. Once again, however, Bergson identifies the two. The free personality is its memory, and since memory is identical with time or with ' duration,' this is equivalent to saying that when we act freely, then we ourselves become duration. When, says Bergson, we seek ' the point where we feel ourselves most intimately within our own life,' when ' we feel the spring of our will strained to its utmost limit,' then ' it is into pure

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

duration that we then plunge back, a duration in which the past, always moving on, is swelling unceasingly with a present that is absolutely new.' ' Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states,' when it ' forms the past and the present states into an organic whole.' Those ' moments of our life when we made some serious decision,' moments which cannot be ' artificially reconstructed by a juxtaposition of simpler states,' are ' in their dynamic unity and wholly qualitative multiplicity,' ' phases of our real and concrete duration, a heterogeneous duration and a living one.'

Having identified the unity of the conscious self with time, Bergson then proceeds to ascribe to time all those properties which really belong to organic life and to organic life all those properties which really belong to time. Thus, for example, organic life, at those moments when it is capable of acting freely, is a unity of inter-penetrating elements unique in its quality, which can be apprehended only by intuition, not by intellectual analysis. According to Bergson the same is true of time. Pure duration, he tells us, is ' nothing but a succession of qualitative changes, which melt into and permeate one another, without precise outlines, without any tendency to externalize themselves in relation to one another ; ' it is ' pure heterogeneity.' In order to comprehend time we must think of the successive notes of a tune. If we merely count the notes, then we are applying the method of intellectual analysis which is not applicable to anything organic or creative ; we must instead grasp the meaning of the tune by an effort of intuition, ' gathering, so to speak, the qualitative impression produced by the whole series ' in such a manner that the past notes survive into the present. The same method must be applied to duration.

If these observations are not particularly illuminating—since to think of the intuition by which we grasp the meaning of a picture, presented in space and not in time, destroys the whole analogy—they are at least harmless. The same cannot be said of Bergson's application to organic life of the properties of time. He may speak of time as though he meant memory, but he cannot ignore the more obvious characteristics of time, and the most obvious fact of all is that when we think of time what we

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

really mean is that events succeed each other and that change is constant. Bergson is accordingly driven to view the human personality not as a multiplicity in unity but as a flux, to identify it with its stream of consciousness. The kind of mental state whose existence Bergson had set out to assert was that in which the different elements are compounded into an organic unity in the pure present—the mental state, in other words, which least resembles a stream and in which we feel ourselves to be least subjected to time. Since, however, Bergson has been led to identify this very kind of mental state with duration, he is compelled to ignore its essential characteristics and to assert that it consists merely of images and of ideas passing in constant succession and nothing more. Free action, in other words, is equated with submission to the flux. The spirit of man becomes nothing but a mysterious and indefinable flow. It is not an entity or a substance or a form ; it is, like duration, a movement in which there is nothing that moves, a growing in which there is nothing which grows, a creative energy in which there is neither a subject which creates, nor a material which is worked upon.

The inconsistency between this doctrine and Bergson's original understanding of free activity becomes particularly plain when he discusses reverie and dream. To dream is to relax our self-control and allow our personality to become dissociated ; our consciousness becomes merely a stream. Suppose, says Bergson, that ' we let ourselves go, and, instead of acting, dream. At once the self is scattered ; our past which till then was gathered together into the indivisible impulsion it communicated to us, is broken up into a thousand recollections made external to one another.' When we thus relax the tension of our will, he asserts on another occasion, so that our attention is detached from life, we fall into a state of reverie, and if we lose the power to regain our self-control, we go mad. On the other hand, when we dream, then we are clearly living in time rather than in space ; we plunge back into memory, and memory, according to Bergson, is purely spiritual. To act, in fact, which requires that we should exclude from consciousness all memories which are not immediately useful, is ' to limit . . . the life of the spirit.' When Bergson remembers these facts, he is driven to praise the state of reverie which he has elsewhere condemned and to assert that when we abandon ourselves to it

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we find ourselves possessed of unusual and mysterious powers. When we dream, he tells us, then ' we no longer measure duration, but we feel it ; from quantity it returns to the state of quality ; we no longer estimate past time mathematically ; the mathematical estimate gives place to a confused instinct, capable, like all instincts, of committing gross errors, but also of acting at times with extraordinary skill.'

If, however, life is a simple movement and nothing more, then there is no distinction between action and knowledge ; both belong to the same onward flow. Bergson's final confusion in his interpretation of life is to identify the intuition by which we apprehend a vital force with that force itself ; to become the urge which drives living creatures forward and to know that urge by an act of intuition are regarded as one and the same thing. But the urge of life is nothing but instinct ; ' instinct . . . is movement on the very form of life.' And Bergson accordingly assumes that instinct, wherever it appears, is knowledge as well as action. It ' implies the knowledge of a matter ; ' it is, in fact, ' sympathy.' The instinct which enables a wasp to know the exact spot in which to strike its victim implies that the wasp has a sympathetic and intuitive knowledge of that victim. The intuition of which human beings are occasionally capable is a survival of instinct ; when the stream of life divided itself into different channels, the insects developed instinct, while the animals, culminating in man, preferred to develop intelligence. But since there was merely a single stream, no element in it could wholly disappear ; and man retained ' a fringe of intuition, vague and evanescent,' like 'a vague nebulosity' round his intelligence. If man is to understand the universe—though if he consist only of action, it is difficult to see why he should wish to understand the universe or how such understanding is possible—then he must recapture these traces of instinct and develop them. For instinct is sympathy, and ' if this sympathy could extend its object and also reflect upon itself, it could give us the key to vital operations.' ' It is to the very inwardness of life that intuition leads us—by intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely. Man, in other words, must eschew his intelligence and, like the wasps, learn to know life in its essence.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A series of fallacies has thus led Bergson to arrange in the same column life, memory, time, free activity, movement, intuition and instinct. In the opposite column, by similar processes of argument, he places matter, perception, space, determined activity, inertia, and intelligence. From the opposition between these various entities he then constructs a cosmology.

Just as Bergson identifies time with our memory of time, so similarly he identifies matter with our perception of matter. Matter he defines—in the language of philosophical idealism—as 'the aggregate of images,' while by perception of matter is meant 'these same images referred to the eventual action of one particular image, my body.' Pure perception, he tells us—in other words perception in the pure present, separated from all the additions made by memory—'gives us the whole or at least the essential part of matter;' 'matter cannot exercise powers of any kind other than those which we perceive;' 'in pure perception we are actually placed outside ourselves, we touch the reality of the object in an immediate intuition.' If then in pure perception the subject which perceives and the object which is perceived are to be regarded as identical, why does there appear to be a distinction between them? The explanation is that the perceiving subject is living on the plane of time as well as on that of space. 'Questions relating to subject and object, to their distinction and their union, should be put in terms of time rather than of space.' 'It is memory alone that lends to perception its subjective character.'

Matter is thus defined, in a very arbitrary fashion, as something which can be wholly known through instantaneous perception. It is therefore something which exists in space and not in time, and to which the method of intellectual analysis can be applied. For since those qualities of interpenetration and of multiplicity in unity which cannot be apprehended by the intelligence have been defined as temporal and not as spatial, it follows that they are not qualities of matter. In reality, however, matter so regarded, as even Bergson is occasionally compelled to admit, is a subjective construction. Matter moves, and movement occurs in time as well as in space, though what relation this kind of time bears to the subjective time which Bergson calls 'duration' is a problem which is left unexplained. Since, however, movement is temporal, it must be spiritual, which means that it can be known only by

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intuition, not by intelligence. As Bergson is never tired of explaining, the paradoxes of Zeno prove that the intelligence is unable to apprehend movement ; it can only analyse it by taking a series of instantaneous snapshots, thereby depriving it of its essential character. That these paradoxes are verbal and that modern mathematics has devised a formula for describing motion which surmounts them—that modern science, which is a creation of the intellect, is wholly devoted to the study not of Bergsonian matter but of the movements which occur in natural phenomena—are facts which Bergson ignores.

Bergson's identification of matter with pure perception leads, therefore, to another series of inconsistencies: sometimes matter is regarded as an objective reality and the intellect as having been moulded upon it ; and sometimes matter is an illusion which, for some mysterious reason, the intellect has created. In accordance with the first view, for example, we are told that ' intellectual knowledge, in so far as it relates to a certain aspect of inert matter, ought . . . to give us a faithful imprint of it, having been stereotyped on this particular object,' ' to reveal to us something of the very essence of which these bodies are made.' Similarly it is asserted that, in some fashion which is never elucidated, matter and intellect have grown up together, by mutual adaptation. ' Intellectuality and materiality have been constituted, in detail, by reciprocal adaptation.' ' The same movement by which the mind is brought to form itself into intellect, that is to say into distinct concepts, brings matter to break itself up into objects excluding one another.'

At other times Bergson goes to the opposite extreme. Matter in its essence is, he asserts, a constant flow, knowable, presumably only through intuition. ' Matter or mind, reality has appeared to us as a perpetual becoming '—a view which, strange to say, Bergson confesses himself to have borrowed from those modern scientists whose intellectualism he so deplores. Pure perception, or the intellect, carves up this flux into objects, which have a merely subjective reality. Space itself and the causal relationships discovered in it do not objectively exist. ' Homogeneous space is " a form of our sensibility." ' ' A relation is a bond established by a mind between two or more terms. A relation is nothing outside the intellect that relates. The universe, therefore, can only

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be a system of laws if phenomena have passed beforehand through the filter of intellect.' The intelligence is impelled to create matter in this fashion because it is an instrument not of knowledge but of action. The nervous elements which compose the brain do not ' work with a view to knowledge ; they do but indicate a number of possible actions at once, or organize one of them.' Why the exigencies of action should impel men to construct a false picture of that world in which they are to act is not explained. Indeed Bergson himself, having explained that perception is merely ' a system of nascent acts,' continues in the same sentence to interpret this as proving that in perception ' the reality of things is no more constructed or reconstructed, but touched, penetrated, lived.'

From these varying opinions one thing at least is plain—that matter, whether subjective or objective, corresponds to some aspect of the human personality. That aspect is the dissociated self whose actions are not free ; just as Bergson identifies time with free activity, so he identifies space with determined activity. The dissociated self is the self which is split into fragments and which can be grasped through intellectual analysis. It has therefore a metaphorical similarity with space, and this similarity Bergson transforms into an identity. ' Let us relax the strain,' he tells us, ' let us interrupt the effort to crowd as much as possible of the past into the present. If the relaxation were complete, there would no longer be either memory or will—which amounts to saying that, in fact, we never do fall into this absolute passivity, any more than we can make ourselves absolutely free. But, in the limit, we get a glimpse of an existence made of a present which re-commences unceasingly—devoid of real duration, nothing but the instantaneous which dies and is born again endlessly.' ' Suppose for a moment,' he suggests, ' that matter consists in this very movement pushed further, and that physics is simply psychics inverted.' And, more boldly, ' physical existence inclines in this second direction, as psychic existence in the first.' In other words, just as dissociation is a tendency which is never wholly completed, so matter indicates a tendency rather than a reality. ' In conferring on matter the property of pure space, we are transporting ourselves to the terminal point of the movement of which matter simply indicates the direction.' ' Matter has a tendency to constitute isolable systems, that can be treated geometrically ' and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which have no ' duration,' but ' it is only a tendency.'

Bergson's universe, therefore, consists of two movements, one movement which tends towards freedom and creativity and is identical with time, and a reverse movement which tends towards necessity and inertia and which, at its extreme limit, becomes spatial; and these two movements are reflections of the two opposing tendencies of the human personality. Within the personality, however, dissociation occurs through the relaxation of a tension ; the same must therefore be true of matter. That creative flow which is movement without anything which moves is in the habit of relaxing its energies, and when it behaves in this manner, matter mysteriously comes into existence. ' Extension . . . appears as a *tension* which is interrupted.' ' A thing *unmaking itself*: such, no doubt, is one of the essential characters of materiality.' Apart from these two tendencies no other is possible. The geometrical order is merely the reverse of the vital order ; it ' produces itself automatically by the interruption of the inverse order ' ; in fact, ' it is this very interruption.' And since both these tendencies are represented inside the human personality, the one knowable through intuition and the other through intelligence, there is nothing strange in man's ability to understand the external world or in the fact that it appears to him as an order—or rather as two opposing kinds of order—and not as a chaos.

This, then, is the Bergsonian cosmology: a creative flux which constantly moves forward, acting with perfect freedom so that the future cannot be predicted ; and opposed to it a material flux which limits its creative freedom, dividing its impulsion into different streams and into various determinate forms to be found in nature. And yet this dualism between time and space, this perpetual conflict between the creative spirit which tends towards freedom and the matter which tends towards inertia, is not fundamental reality. The universe is monistic, and if life is spirit making itself, matter is the same spirit unmaking itself. Such a vision inspires Bergson to his most impassioned rhetoric. ' The same kind of action is going on everywhere,' he tells us, ' whether it is that which is unmaking itself or whether it is that which is striving to remake itself,' and ' I simply express this probable similitude when I speak of a centre from which worlds shoot out like rockets in a fire-work display—provided, however, that I do not present

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the centre as a *thing*, but as a continuity of shooting out.' The vital flux is 'an action which is making itself across an action of the same kind which is unmaking itself, like the fiery path torn by the last rocket of a firework display through the black cinders of the spent rockets that are falling dead.'

A dualism between matter and the creative energies of the spirit would, at least, have been comprehensible. It would have even made it possible to understand Bergson's deification of movement and his comparison of life to a flow and a stream and a current; since such images are conceivable only if we also postulate something which—relatively speaking—does not move, something by comparison with which the flow of the current can be measured. And Bergson frequently speaks as though such a dualism were fundamental. He explains the evolutionary process as indicating that 'a broad current of consciousness had penetrated matter.' The purpose of this current is to achieve freedom, 'to engraft on to the necessity of physical forces the largest possible amount of indetermination,' and this purpose is most nearly achieved in man, who is therefore the culmination of the process. Unfortunately the subjectivism which makes it impossible for Bergson to strive at a plausible and objective version of matter compels him to assume that, ultimately, it is a product of the same spiritual energy as life. From this it follows that the energies of the creative flux are limited; for it is only by the relaxation of their tension that matter comes into being, though it is difficult to understand what causes should originally have provoked this relaxation. Bergson must therefore admit that 'the impetus is finite, and it has been given once for all.' 'The force which is evolving through the organized world is a limited force which . . . always remains inadequate to the work it would fain produce.' Such a cosmology would not appear to offer any encouragement to optimism. Under such circumstances there can be no guarantee that the vital force or its embodiment in man will go on to farther triumphs. Indeed, if we assume that time is infinite, we must assume a universe in which the force which makes itself and the force which unmakes itself are evenly balanced against each other and in which progress is an illusion. Like the pragmatists, however, Bergson prefers not to dwell on such gloomy possibilities. Man belongs to a stream which is destined to go on to yet greater triumphs. Victory is

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

certain and defeat impossible. The vital flux is like a cavalry charge in which man, mounted on animality, will overwhelm all opposition, conquer perhaps even death itself, and become master of his destiny. By this warlike metaphor Bergson, like a patriotic orator, intends, apparently, to conceal all that is doubtful and disturbing in his system by dissolving rationality in a flood of emotion.

If, now, we inquire what is likely to be the practical effect of Bergsonism on those who takes it seriously, two answers are possible, according as we emphasize one tendency or another in his cosmology. If life is a movement, and if this movement is identical throughout the whole evolutionary process, then obedience to blind impulse, without regard for the criticisms of the intelligence, would seem to be the correct behaviour of the Bergsonian—a conclusion which has usually been drawn both by Bergson's disciples and by his critics. Bergson himself, when he applies his philosophy to the problems of morality, arrives at a somewhat similar doctrine, although he does not formulate it so bluntly. Let us go beyond the ethic of the tribe, he exhorts us—an ethic which is formulated in intellectual terms in a code of laws, and which, though created by nature to meet its own purposes, is now an encumbrance upon the progress of humanity. And let us make unnecessary those religious beliefs which came into existence in order to counterbalance the dissolvent and dispiriting influences of the intelligence. If we identify ourselves with the vital flux itself, if we recover contact with the original fountain-head of the energies of mankind, we shall need neither the guidance of a morality nor the consolations of religion. Such a doctrine would seem to point to a morality of power, beyond conventional good and evil, since if the vital flux is to be identified with any one impulse it must surely be that of power. Bergson, however, remembering perhaps his identification of instinct with the sympathetic knowledge given by intuition, insists that the vital flow is love. It is, he assures us, the same as ' the mystic love of humanity,' and if we merge ourselves in the flood, we too shall love humanity. Since, however, love can only be a relationship between at least two separate entities, whereas the vital flow is a continuous stream without distinction of subject and object, it is difficult to see how love can be its essential characteristic ;

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and suspicion therefore remains that Bergsonism in practice must logically lead to action undertaken for its own sake and without regard for rational restrictions.

There is, however, another element in Bergsonism which, though not admitted by its master, periodically reveals its presence. If matter is hostile to the life of the spirit, and if the spirit is memory, and if action involves a limitation upon memory, then it would seem to follow that we are most spiritual when we are least involved in action. Bergsonism may also, therefore, be used to justify a neuropathic withdrawal from life. If this may seem fanciful, one need only remark that precisely this conclusion was drawn by Bergson's most distinguished disciple. Marcel Proust was haunted, as a true Bergsonian so easily might be, by a sense of universal change and instability ; persons, emotions, beliefs, ambitions—all were subject to the flux of time, so that it was impossible to say that anything remained the same for more than a moment. Where then was reality to be found?—for surely nothing that was evanescent could be regarded as real. Then the revelation came—a revelation which is described as suggested by a piece of madeline dipped in a tea-cup but which must surely have owed something to a reading of *Matter and Memory*. The past had not vanished ; it still existed—in the memories of those who had experienced it. This was the true immortality. To relieve the past in memory was to live in the spirit. In Proust's novel the Bergsonian philosophy is transmuted into great art, and to this extent, therefore, it can claim justification. And yet if Proust was a great writer, he was also a neuropathic individual ; and that his personal weaknesses were the origin of his art does not prevent them from being weaknesses. Bergsonism of this kind is the philosophy of an invalid, separated from actuality, who occupies himself with reverie and dream.

We may summarize the tendencies of Bergsonism by means of a conception coined by Nietzsche. Human life oscillates between two poles—the pole of drunkenness whose god is Dionysus and the pole of dream whose god is Apollo. Wisdom consists in finding a harmony between the two deities. This was the wisdom which Bergson set out to vindicate. His system, however, in its actual implications, gives no encouragement to harmony and balance. It leads to the apotheosizing either of one extreme or of the other.

H. B. PARKES.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MUSICAL TASTE

A GENERAL HISTORY OF MUSIC from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period (1789), by Charles Burney, Mus.D., F.R.S. Edited by Frank Mercer (G. T. Foulis and Co., Ltd., 2 vols. 31/6).

Mr. Mercer and his publisher are to be congratulated on this handsome edition of a very important work. Though first published in 1789, Burney's *History* is much more than a curious antique. Its author was recognized as the most learned European musician of his day, and we may still feel gratitude and respect for the founder of modern musical research. His labours produced abundant fruit which is not yet without value to students. But neither its stores of information nor the pious memory of its author will prove the most interesting features of this work to a modern reader. Our curiosity will be centred rather on the author himself, and we shall regard his book not so much as a standard work, or one that paved the way for standard works, but as a unique example of eighteenth century mentality, a picture of musical history from the viewpoint of a member of Dr. Johnson's circle.

The eighteenth century was a period of great antiquarians, and Dr. Burney was among the most careful and enthusiastic of them. His *History* can be set beside his friend Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, Warton's *History of English Poetry*, Percy's *Reliques* and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, for it has all their tireless industry in compiling accurate bodies of historical fact and all their peculiar prejudices when judgment and criticism have to be employed. The preparation of the *History* Burney tells us, required 'thirty years in meditation, and twenty in writing and printing.' No great national libraries, no printed catalogues and no organized body of research workers were available to assist the gigantic task Burney had assigned himself; yet he claims to have examined all the innumerable relevant sources he quotes. His industry and accuracy in such circumstances are thoroughly worthy of respect, but they do not seem to have been uncommon in his period. What is more remarkable is that he can speak of such a work as intended for

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the great body of readers and not merely for the specialist. 'I would rather,' he says, 'be pronounced trivial than tiresome'; and for that reason he admits he has chosen a middle course between a learned and scientific history and one likely to appeal to those 'seeking for mere amusement in the narrative.' Of whatever complacency the eighteenth century may be accused it cannot be accused of lack of interest in preceding periods; nor did 'popular' romances satisfy this interest. At least a large section of the reading public could grapple with information; and, on the other hand, it was not thought necessary to be dull and unliterary in order to appear scientific. Although the subscription to the *History* was two guineas, there was never any danger of its being a financial failure. Some of Burney's other books actually had some literary success, particularly *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, the model of Johnson's *Tour to the Hebrides*.

The best part of the *History* is that dealing with the music of the writer's own century. The first volume in this edition is virtually a white elephant: even the author admits that he knows nothing of ancient music. Much of the later material has been so greatly amplified by more recent researchers as to leave Burney somewhat out-of-date. But the account of the rise of Italian opera in this country is unique, and later writers will always owe a great deal to it. The fact is that Burney is handicapped and strengthened at the same time by an all-pervading sense of the present. The music of his own time did really seem to him the most important of all music. He worked backward from it, tracing its development and criticizing other music by its standards.

Of course, this is a thoroughly bad way of writing history, though one not peculiar to the eighteenth century. It is bad because it limits the mind to one set of attitudes, the set fashionable at a fleeting moment of time. It has been the common blindness of social and political historians, especially the Whigs, who have valued events in terms of their own social concepts. The benefit of studying history is that the imagination may reconstruct other systems of judgment, thus creating a standard by which contemporary society and art can be appreciated. Elizabethan music, for instance, cannot be intelligently studied without an understanding of the fundamental part it played in social life, the extent to which literature held a share in its estate and its roots

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in traditional popular song. Such an approach did not occur to Burney, though it must be admitted that he had some justification for assuming that society had not fundamentally changed in the centuries immediately preceding him. The traditions that had governed English life from time immemorial had not yet been broken. The tunes of the English countryside were largely the tunes that Bottom and Dogberry had known. England had a particularly rich and widely diffused musical tradition, and Burney's contemporary, Bishop Percy, brought back to polite circles many ballads of 'old unhappy, far-off things' that were still very vividly alive in the transformation they had undergone by passing through the consciousness of the nation and that would have afforded Burney many valuable clues to the early parts of his history. That he knew of the strength of this tradition is certain, if only from the ballad opera, that curious rejoinder of a nation to a foreign importation that threatens to overwhelm it. But Burney did not realize his good fortune and undervalued a possible link between himself and the past. Like most academic men, he preferred the evidence of books to that of life. To him the tunes in the *Beggar's Opera* were merely 'wild, rude, and often vulgar melodies,' though furnished with excellent basses by Dr. Pepusch, and 'the morality and the Music are equally intelligible and acceptable to the galleries.' The defect is not incidental to Burney's *History*: it is the clue to what was happening in his time. Admirable as much of the music of contemporary composers was, one cannot help feeling that is represents the mind of a society whose roots are weakening. The standard is an Italian one, and compared with Purcell one senses something exotic and also a certain lack of depth and intensity of feeling. After Burney, indeed, came the deluge. He wrote as late as it was possible to write such a *History*. The very year his masterpiece was published the Bastille fell to the Paris mob, and the Industrial Revolution was already eating into the vulgar culture Burney overlooked. The select audience Burney addressed, the tree with such splendid foliage but such feeble roots, was swept before the whirlwind, and the Common Readers Burney and Johnson both addressed ceased to form even an authoritative inner circle to which taste deferred. English music was almost submerged. No native composer of even respectable rank appeared for over a century.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is not to deny the very real merits of Burney's society. He served an aristocratic audience whose standards of taste were high. England possessed in his time what it has seldom had since, an intelligent and critical public for music. Handel settled here because the rewards of a successful composer were better here than on the Continent and he was able to live as a gentleman among gentlemen. It was the only country where music publishing really paid, and Handel had no occasion to despise the part of his income that came from that source. But the circle in which he moved, though it set the tone for society as a whole, though its approved standards filtered into the currents of national life—Handel's long reign in the popular mind is an illustration—was essentially a London one. What one misses is a native vigour so conspicuously present in the products of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Something more than musical fashions was involved. One sign of the change in modes of expression—hence of thought and life—is the poetic diction of the eighteenth century. The Italian operatic style is exactly parallel and springs from the same fundamental causes.

The change from the older English style that begins with Purcell is only partly explained by Italian influence. Purcell and his successors copied the Italians because they found there something they themselves were striving after. The beginnings of the new outlook manifest themselves first in the growth of public concerts, which were first apparently organized by dispossessed organists during the Commonwealth. Thereafter music is concert music or theatre music (which is the same thing). Even the popular ballads after the Restoration frequently bear the recommendation ' A new playhouse air.' The string fantasias of Purcell, looking back to the Elizabethan masters, are the last echo of the home music that had previously been the only alternative to church music. This change was accompanied by a greater insistence on clarity and form, on harmonic structure easy for listeners to understand, so that even chamber music was brought under the domination of concert music. The virtues of the school to which Burney gave allegiance are therefore dramatic rather than reflective, and this he implicitly recognizes when he praises Bach's mastery of technique but adds that ' If Sebastian Bach and his admirable son Emanuel, instead of being musical directors in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

commercial cities, had been fortunately employed to compose for the public stage and public of great capitals, such as Naples, Paris, or London, and for performers of the first class, they would doubtless have simplified their style more to the level of their judges ; the one would have sacrificed all unmeaning art and contrivance, and the other been less fantastical and *recherché*, and both by writing in a style more popular, and generally intelligible and pleasing, would have extended their fame, and been indisputably the greatest musicians of the present century ' (Vol. II, p. 955). The music Burney admired, then, was for listeners rather than performers, and its great virtue was lucidity and clarity. With them went a certain restriction of resources, an insistence on restraint and correctness. The qualities desired by the period are real ones, and any careless belittlement of their narrowness would be liable to overlook their obvious value. A revolution similar to that completed in literature by Pope had overtaken music since Locke and even since Purcell, and Handel embodied the virtues of the new style. A certain rigidity in tonality and rhythm was inevitable, but it would be a mistake to suppose that Burney was deluded by the mere outer shell of form. Indeed he explicitly commends Handel for the passion he infuses into the forms he employs, and we must suppose that the effect on English audiences was one of complete novelty. Behind the restraint of Handel, his apparent simplicity of harmony and texture, is a certain mental attitude that belongs to a highly developed and rich civilization. The emotion is not lacking, though it is a different kind of emotion from that of the Romantics. And it was because of its success in expressing this restrained, formalized emotion that the Italian opera won universal dominion. While believing that Italian was probably the language best suited to singing, Burney defends Italian opera primarily as a concert in costume, anticipating the nineteenth century criticism of it—it was the music that counted, and England could not produce the necessary texts because its men of letters, Addison, Pope and Swift in particular, could not continue the very wide and intelligent interests of Dryden, who understood the music of his time as he understood most things that befitted an intelligent man of the world. Few things in history are more creditable than the way England received Burney's hero, Handel, who was ' himself alone,' and yet brought this

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Italian opera, the essence of a whole civilization, to a splendid consummation.

Among English composers Burney recognized the supreme merit of Purcell. ' Handel, who flourished in a less barbarous age for his art, has been acknowledged his superior in many particulars; but in none more than the art and grandeur of his choruses, the harmony and texture of his organ fugues, as well as his great style in playing that instrument ; the majesty of his hautbois and grand concertos, the ingenuity of the accompaniments of his songs and choruses, and even in the general melody of the airs themselves ; yet in the accent, passion, and expression of *English words*, the vocal music of Purcell is, sometimes to my feelings, as superior to Handel's as an original poem to a translation ' (II, p. 406). The comparison is revealing. The gain in clarity had been accompanied by an increase of what we may term magniloquence, in which the subtle play of fancy that so distinguishes Purcell had been lost. If we turn our eyes from Handel to the smaller composers Burney accepts, we cannot fail to perceive that the elegant language of the time, the studied modulations, the securely based harmony, have been allowed to run ahead of the imagination. Where Handel's genius was lacking his magniloquence and fluency could be faked. It was not the barbarousness of the preceding ages that allowed its harmony often to be crude, its melody unflowing. The irregularities Burney so much deplored in Dowland's harmony, and still more in Gesualdo's, were not due to licence but to an attempt to explore the emotional resources of chromaticism, to an imagination that felt experience in more varied modes than Burney's time was able to do. The Elizabethan barring that so much worried him was the product of a finer ear, that could more subtly counterpoint rhythm in metre. Of the spirit of this earlier music Purcell retained much, but something had undoubtedly been lost between Purcell and Burney. The language of music had gained at the expense of the feeling. There was not the fine balance between them that Purcell, the heir to the Elizabethan music, had managed to attain. Handel was to prove a dangerous influence in the long run.

To separate the many hints this interesting *History* affords would be a long business. Enough has perhaps been said to indicate the nature of Burney's public. It was a cosmopolitan coterie not

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yet out of touch with the nation and with definite standards: England will never see any comparable with it again. But compared with the public and the spirit of the England between Byrd and Purcell it was poor in imagination and depth of tradition. The English character had lost something it has never regained. Its music was no longer closely related to its everyday work and leisure: it was more of a luxury acknowledging the sway of the cultural hierarchy. The capacity to explore and unify diverse and unusual kinds of experience, to fuse the sensuous and the intellectual, which is so conspicuous a feature of the bolder madrigalists, and, in a different style, of Purcell, those had given way to formalism that still contained life but possessed less vitality to support and control minor composers. We can estimate the eighteenth century's loss if we ask why Arne is in many ways so less individual and interesting than Matthew Locke, who was certainly no more talented and suffered from living in between two styles of composition.

BRUCE PATTISON.

W. EMPSON'S CRITICISM

SOME VERSIONS OF PASTORAL, by William Empson (Chatto and Windus, 8/6).

It is five years since Mr. Empson startled the literary world with his first critical book. Since then *Seven Types of Ambiguity* has established itself as an indispensable aid to 'the training of sensibility.' Its virtues were so exceptional (and so signally unrecognized by the majority of the reviewers) that one had to insist on their recognition rather than dwell on the faults. M. C. Bradbrook in an essay in *Scrutiny*, Vol. II, No. 3, dealt fairly with both; while commending his use of a critically valuable analytic method she noted that it did not lead him frequently enough to an exercise of judgment, 'a sense of relative values without which criticism is no more than a game for the intelligent and an emotional showerbath.' One had reason, then, to expect something extraordinary from his latest book; that the facetiousness, the desire to 'show off' his varied talents, the effort to 'undercut the specialists and awe the undergraduate' would have been dropped with advancing years; and above all, that there

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would be an attempt to apply this ability and this critical method to the true work of criticism.

Some Versions of Pastoral is undoubtedly interesting (it could hardly fail to be that) but it lacks first of all the vigour and exuberance of the earlier book. Consequently it fails to carry one through the occasional niggling and the author's wilfulness is sometimes as exasperating as the use in an adult of schoolboy slang. The pastoral theme only imperfectly binds the eight essays together ; some of them are capable of standing alone. Two of them—*Proletarian Literature* and *Marvell's ' Garden '* appeared in *Scrutiny*, the latter as early as 1932. The initial unity of the book being so slight the author has little scruple about pursuing digressions whenever (and it is not seldom) they invite.

The first essay—*Proletarian Literature*—besides being introductory is rather detached from the rest of the book. The idea of proletarian literature is ' popular and vague but somehow obvious ' and does not lend itself to the close work for which Mr. Empson is famous. Nevertheless this chapter is by far the best and most refreshing. Good sense on a topic which has exercised most of our contemporary critics and provoked much nonsense is a welcome change.

The book is set out so as to exhibit pastoral ideas in a roughly historical order. The author first deals with double plots ' because the interaction of the two plots gives a particularly clear setting for, or machine for imposing, the social and metaphysical ideas on which pastoral depends.' This approach gives the greatest possible scope to the development of ingenious ambiguities with the minimum control of judgment. Each play is never approached as a whole or allowed to determine which of the interpretations of the plots shall be chosen. Indeed ' the more the merrier ' the author feels. But it makes tiresome reading unless one is as well-read as Mr. Empson. One can remember and re-read a play and thus put oneself in the place of the critic and check his judgments. But here the author takes the plots and relates the ideas discovered latent in them to a host of outside material which is only touched on briefly—' magical ideas '—short histories of ' feelings which were in the air ' at any period. Even the learned may miss—for example, in his account of the cult of the child (in his last chapter) —the humility of *Seven Types* where on the same subject he said,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

' Of course these pet little theories are ridiculously simple.' But Mr. Empson admittedly is not writing ' a solid piece of sociology ' or attempting to deal thoroughly with the pastoral theme.

The theme comes more into its own in the last two chapters on *The Beggar's Opera* and *Alice in Wonderland*. ' The essential process behind the *Opera*,' he finds to be, ' a resolution of heroic and pastoral into a cult of independence.' It is a work for which he has a great admiration and he bestows on it a loving amount of careful classification of the types of comedy and multiple irony it displays. But the triumph of his method is seen in the *Alice* essay. ' The essential idea behind the books is a shift on to the child, which Dodgson did not invent, of the obscure tradition of pastoral.' The Child takes the place of the Swain. Mr. Empson here seems completely master of the scene and fully equipped to give *Alice* what has been so generally shirked, serious criticism. He knows just how to handle the psycho-analytic method, he is judicious in his recourse to biographical details. The result is that he is able to reveal a surprising number of latent ideas at work: Evolution, parodies of Wordsworth and Tennyson ; and to give the above-mentioned history of the child-cult whose beginning ' may be placed at the obscure edition of *Mother Goose's Melodies* (John Newberry, 1760).' There can be very little of importance left to say about *Alice*.

But one must read this essay to appreciate the power of the distraction from which Mr. Empson is suffering. If in *Seven Types* he was led from the main business of criticism it was as it were against his will and in pursuit of a critically valuable method. But here he positively prefers to take the indirect approach to poems (there is an essay on Bentley's commentary on Milton and Zachary Pearce's reply), perhaps to show what wonders he can do in the manipulation of abstractions or elements or ideas.

In one chapter alone he appears for a moment to acknowledge the reproach and returns to wrestle with a concrete poem, but as if the distraction were too strong he continues with a pursuit which he himself admits to be of doubtful value. The poem is Sonnet 94. (' They that have powre to hurt and will doe none '). Here the material is all before the reader—the fourteen printed lines. Mr. Empson sets out to explore the admittedly difficult irony. (Irony is one of the main themes of the book). We are back in the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

atmosphere of *Seven Types*. ' You can work through al the notes in the Variorum without finding out whether flower, lily, " owner," and person addressed are alike or opposed. One would like to say that the poem has all possible such meanings, digested into some order, and then try to show how this is done, but the mere number of possible interpretations is amusingly too great. Taking the simplest view (that any two may be alike in some one property) any one of the four either is or is not and either should or should not be like each of the others ; this yields 4096 possible movements of thought, with other possibilities. The niggler is routed here ; one has honestly to consider what seems important.' The discussion which follows is impressive. But feeling unsatisfied (and perhaps the itch for a freer field of speculation) he goes off on a biographical tack—to discover what was the original situation between Shakespeare and W. H. ' A part of the situation of the Sonnets, the actual phrases designed for it, are given to Prince Henry, to Angelo, to Troilus, to the Greek army ; getting further from the original as time went on. I shall look at the first two. It is only partly true that this untidy process, if successful, might tell one more about the original situation ; discoveries of language and feeling made from a personal situation may develop themselves so that they can be applied to quite different dramatic situations ; but to know about these might tell one more about the original discoveries.' But though this leads the author to develop some interesting ambiguities in the relation between Falstaff and the Prince we do not seem to advance to a further appreciation of the sonnet. And ' Angelo is further from the sonnets than Henry both in date and situation.' The chapter ends with saying that the feeling of the sonnet that life is essentially inadequate to the human spirit is part of pastoral.

I hope that it will be clear from these inadequate remarks that *Some Versions of Pastoral* would not make a fit companion volume to *Seven Types* on the shelves of the beginner in criticism. For those who are proof against his bad example Mr. Empson can offer besides the ingenious speculations here scorned as irrelevant a number of *belles pages* on poems and authors which can be easily got at from an index. Further editions of *Seven Types* would benefit from the same aid.

H. A. MASON.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A NEW CRITIC OF BALLET

RUSSIAN BALLET THROUGH RUSSIAN EYES, by V. Kameneff (Russian Books and Library, 3/6).

RUSSIAN BALLETS, by Adrian Stokes (Faber and Faber, 7/6).

By those who want something out of the rut in ballet criticism —the gossipy rut of Mr. Haskell or the flowery rut of Mr. Stokes— this rather spasmodic book of Mr. Kameneff's ought not to be missed. It is in the nature of a guerrilla campaign against the irresponsible criticism which is now consolidating itself and establishing its respectability on every side. Sometimes Mr. Kameneff attacks other critics directly, sometimes implicitly through his fragmentary criticisms of specific ballets. His own position is well indicated in his reaction to Mr. Stokes: 'In his book *Russian Ballets*, Mr. Adrian Stokes tells us that "Watching *Les Présages* is like watching the gulls over the dark Thames embankment. Behind, the intermittent trams thunder, cars pass in endless streams. Below the dark stone ; beneath the gulls in their array, the waters run, etc."

Of course, Mr. Stokes has a perfect right to amuse himself in his leisured moments by noting various visual or auditory images that may be associated with a particular ballet, but what useful purpose it serves we cannot imagine . . . He claims his book to be a "pioneer work . . . initiating work that will finally close a gap in æsthetic studies." Actually, he is making a "literary study" of the ballets, in other words, he is trying to explain one art form (ballet) through another art form (literature).'

From the point of view of adverse criticism it is hardly necessary to expand this ; indeed a large part of Mr. Stokes' book reads like the programme notes distributed at concerts, a kind of writing so discredited in literary criticism that no examination of it is worth while here. Even as an elementary sensitizer it is valuable only rarely when it escapes from its prevailing eccentricity and irrelevance of association.

Mr. Stokes' impressionistic method admits small possibility of constructive general statement. The 'major argument' promised in the preface is almost lost amongst the laboured

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

poeticizing. Ostensibly it deals with the relationships that may exist between music and dancing. The nearest approach to a comprehensible statement of the theme is found when Mr. Stokes says that ' . . . whereas in classical ballet . . . the music so often draws or impels the dancers, in this first movement especially of *Présages*, the roles are sometimes completely reversed. Verchinina draws on the music, compels the musical rhythm to move across the stage.' Fokine is supposed to represent some undefined transitional stage between these two relationships: in *Sylphides* ' The dancers are still classical dancers, but their movements seem to be qualified by the invisible air (the music) that touches them, just as moonlight seems to harp upon and smooth the trees.' And again, ' the music of *Sylphides* plays the tractional role in a manner more pervasive.' Nowhere does Mr. Stokes advance beyond these vague metaphorical suggestions as to the nature of the difference he has perceived.

Mr. Kameneff sees clearly that, in the present boom period of ballet, criticism ought to be a far more responsible task than it is. In particular he expects critics to mean something exact by the words they use and, further, to take responsibility for the standards that their words imply: ' In the *Daily Telegraph* of September 13th, 1935, Mr. Arnold Haskell speaking of *Prince Igor*, says: " The original choreography has been considerably modified with the consequent loss of savagery, but Woizikovsky and Raievska make it notable." Does he really affirm that butchery of such a perfection can be made notable by any means whatsoever? . . . In the *Daily Telegraph* of September 25th, 1935, Mr. Arnold Haskell says that Kniaseff's ballet *Biroska* came second to *The Green Table* at the International Competition some years ago. Does he regard these two ballets as Miss Germany and Miss Russia? Further, he describes *Biroska* as " a pleasing little phantasy, own cousin to Pavlova's *Autumn Leaves*." Does not he know that it is also a poor great-grand-aunt of the Diaghilevian ballets?'

Mr. Kameneff's critical comments on ballets themselves are always quite evidently opinions—may sometimes seem, in manner at least, opinionated—and they are not here put so persuasively as they might perhaps be in a lengthier and more detailed form. But they have the refreshing virtue of being explicit and concrete ;

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they are as discussable as comments made while the ballet is in progress; they can be examined. Of *Les Cent Baisers*, for instance: 'The *décor* looks like a cheap oleograph, carefully licked over, entirely antiquated and most unsuitable in its realism for a fairy tale. The costumes are equally *mauvais goût*. Baronova is dressed more like a granny than a young fairy princess.' One may agree or disagree—and either attitude will mean something since both parties will at least know what they are talking about. Of none other of our ballet critics could one with any confidence say that. The same virtue in Mr. Kameneff leads him to make the obvious criticisms, those which get overlooked during incantation; for instance that in *Jardin Public* 'the *rôle* of the poet is cheaply melodramatic, and is unworthy of such a magnificent artist as Yurek Shabelevsky; and a ballerina as accomplished as Danilova ought never to have consented to express herself in a rumba *à la Ritz*.'

In this book Mr. Kameneff has attempted nothing much beyond opinions such as an intelligent man speaking to intelligent equals might offer during the interval. This in itself is much to be grateful for in place of incantation before devotees or inner gossip for an outer circle. For a more developed criticism of ballet, as for any art form, opinions of this kind are only a first step, though an essential first step. The serious critic is aware not only of his own opinion but also of the large variety of conflicting opinions on the same point which others may hold, and his statement of the case consists as much in dissuasion from those views as in the assertion of his own; it may be done explicitly, or by the tone of a phrase, or through the implications of cultural assumptions that have already been argued. It is this that gives good criticism not its balance only but its enduring persuasive power. Whether Mr. Kameneff will be able to achieve this critical technique remains to be seen.

He is at least aware of one thing that other critics neglect—the necessity for a rich cultural background to ballet and the inevitable decline of a company whose dancers and choreographers are no longer in touch with the vital movements in the other arts. In this he sees a possible danger for the company of Col. de Basil. Here again, however, his positive standards are not fully argued (they hardly could be in so short a book) and there is a tendency

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to refer for sanction to Diaghileff in a way that gives him something of a papal function.

But with all reservations made, the fact remains that where other critics are fairly obviously in blind alleys Mr. Kameneff has taken a step in ballet criticism from which it would be possible to advance.

D.W.H. and E.M.

THE ASIATICS, a novel, by Frederic Prokosch (Chatto and Windus, 8/6).

This book is of interest as an experiment in fiction. It is an imaginative interpretation of travel through Asia, the countries and towns of that continent playing as important a part as the characters. Starting from Beirut a young man travels to Damascus, Constantinople, Tiflis, Teheran, thence to India, Ceylon, Burma and Indo-China. He experiences improbable adventures and meets people who invariably take a great liking to him and, by well-nigh impossible coincidence, meet him again in other places. He is not troubled by the usual exigencies and difficulties of travel in remote countries, there is always somebody conveniently at hand to speak English, there is always somebody to befriend him and give him assistance and money. Any ' pretty girl ' he likes the look of will inevitably creep into his arms at night.

This fantasy with a glaze of realism might be welcome if it were convincing but, unfortunately, the characteristic scenes and incidents fail to touch the reader who remains outside, excluded from emotional or mental participation in them.

The book reads like a series of dreams and the incidents occur in the inconsequential and planless manner of dreams ; at times they become nightmarish owing to the emphasis placed on unpleasant or even repulsive incidences or sensations. The people are as vague and indistinct as people seen in dreams, and the countries and towns through the young man passes are equally vague and shadowy.

Occasionally, however, a scene takes definite form and produces a vivid picture in the mind of the reader, as in this example:

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'Before I went to bed I stood in my bedroom and looked across the silent lawn toward the lily-pool. There were three willow trees nodding over the water, and beneath one of them I glimpsed the white garments of two servant boys. The water was absolutely still, a sheet of mercury under a chilling half-moon. From far away came the toneless melancholy cry of a bird, no bird that I knew—some unidentifiable Indian bird. Overhead were long thin clouds floating toward the south, whitened by the moon. They too seemed frightening and unreal, moving in sleep.'

This quotation shows Mr. Prokosch's power of concise description and ability to produce an effect with economy of words. Its context illustrates the fundamental weakness of this book. Throughout this long novel the author is concerned almost exclusively with the sensuous impressions received by the young traveller, he does not permit him to have any values and seldom allows him to use his mind. Experiences merely produce in him happiness or unhappiness (physical comfort or discomfort would be a more accurate description) and when the young man attempts anything approaching constructive thought the conclusions at which he arrives are elementary.

Possibly this extremely narrow and superficial outlook is deliberately self-imposed, there is a suggestion of this in the paragraph:

'And so I concluded: don't be strong; don't be alone; don't be proud; it's your only chance ever to understand anythings at all. Be fragile, be tender, humiliate yourself and let the discoloration of the dream close in on you. Do that, and oddly enough you'll remain healthy; you'll be yourself; you'll discover the best way to live in this particular, most fruitless and tantalizing of possible worlds.'

If such was the aim of the author he has proved, if proof were needed, the falseness of his theory.

Mr. Prokosch has imagination and ability but needs the discipline of a wider outlook on life.

E. S. HUELIN.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REGIONAL NOVELS

In spite of all the solemn writing that, on the other side of the Atlantic, has in recent years been devoted to the subject of the Regional Novel, there are excuses for a scepticism that refuses to consider that subject as more serious than a future academic classification. Translate the notion of regionalism as an inspiration for a novel into English terms, and we inevitably think of writers of the stature of Mr. Eden Philpotts, Miss Sheila Kaye Smith, Mary Webb . . . the novelist ' who has done for his (her) county what Hardy has done for Wessex,' as the reviewing formula runs. What was once Wordsworthshire is now Walpoleshire. Continuing to reflect on these lines, we register a suspicion that the esteemed regional novel is some commonplace work of fiction made interesting to the Boots Library public by a painstaking application of rural local colour (the popular reputation of so poor a novel as *Under the Greenwood Tree* is perhaps explicable thus). When on the other hand a novel noticeably grounded in the regional achieves artistic distinction, isn't its success a matter of being a work of art like any other great novel, and the regional element merely a factor contributing incidentally to its greatness? It would hardly occur to most people to think of *Wuthering Heights*,[1] for instance, as a regional novel, or even *The Mill on the Floss*. And an inspection of the contemporary American regional novels suggests that this genre is either a commercially profitable line of goods—a cashing in by a professional fiction-monger on a knowledge of an attractive locality, as in England—or else an excuse for left-wing propaganda.

Honey in the Horn[2] however demonstrates impressively that the regional novel may have a function in American literature. Its striking success as a piece of literature is not to be explained by its being a well-made *novel*, for though it is evidently written with the greatest care it would have no interest for the kind of critic who investigates technique by graphs and diagrams ; though

[1]Though Mrs. Gaskell was impressed on visiting Haworth by ' such wild tales of the ungovernable families who lived or had lived therein that *Wuthering Heights* even seemed tame comparatively.'
[2]By H. L. Davis (Lovat Dickson, 8/6).

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it involves the use of fiction neither fable nor action contribute much towards the total effect. It reminds one in many ways of *Huckleberry Finn* and the comparable works of Mark Twain, which were early claimed by the regional school. *Honey in the Horn* is a detailed account of life in the state of Oregon during the homesteading period (1906-8), the kind of life lived by all sorts of people there, and the effect on character of the different natural environments and various ways of picking a living out of the land. Evidently the author has soaked himself in the anecdotes and reminiscences of the surviving pioneers, and he has composed the book entirely in the diction and dialect of the Oregon homesteaders themselves—that is, to an outsider he seems to have caught an idiom and to use it racily and not antiquarianly: no other medium could have been employed without making the book literary. The writing is rich in simile, and the similes with I think one exception fall within the boundaries of the life depicted.

The interest of the book lies in this impersonal yet inside observation of the tussle between men and nature, and its distinction in its absence of a theoretical or literary point of view —nothing is assumed or expected, everything is met as it turns up with the same careful scrutiny. To the nature of this scrutiny I must return later. First it must be remarked that this kind of undertaking necessarily concentrates on motivation and character. The peculiar conditions of the homesteading society favour pronounced manifestations of character, and in a community where everyone talks so much outstanding personalities inevitably acquire mythological proportions in time (Gentle Annie, 'a forthright spirit of the district' is a rich case in point—no one could have spontaneously invented her). The novel is therefore rooted in a folk-outlook, draws on a folk-humour and embodies a kind of folk-wisdom.

A useful contrast lies to hand in another recent regional novel, *So Red the Rose*,[1] which was a steady best-seller in the U.S.A. It is fairly representative of a more usual type of regional novel, though it has the unusual advantage of being written by an intelligent dramatic critic. It is a thin, delicate piece of fiction (*Honey in the Horn* is juicy and robust) about the Old South and the planter

[1]Stark Young (Cassell, 7/6).

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

society at the time of the Civil War. It is drenched with sweet and tender emotion (*Honey in the Horn* is salty and dispassionate) and though its author has equally studied his period by drawing on family history, etc., one merely gets the impression of overhearing a private family gathering and not following what all the fuss is about. Mr. Stark Young's novel is, briefly, the kind of regional novel that gets local colour mainly in the form of dress, cooking and interior decoration, with a little judicious period idiom. It is genuine enough as regards the emotion mentioned above, and though worth reading won't bear re-reading, whereas *Honey in the Horn* gains by every re-reading. Unlike the romantic regional novel of the machine-age city-dweller, the latter has for function not to create nostalgia or to minister to day-dreams ; quite the opposite, to sharpen one's awareness of the quality of character and so improve one's ability to assess it: to do that involves making value-judgments on both the writer's and the reader's part. Not ' character ' in the degenerate sense that, thanks to reviewers, Book Society committees and popular lecturers, it has come to have—where an appearance of verisimilitude in externals and some easily seizable quaintness, preferably of the loveable order, suffices to set the reader agreeably day-dreaming. The presentation of characters is not a self-indulgence on the part of this author, who is notably austere towards his *personæ*. To deal in character in these terms demands first-hand qualities of character in an author—' The arts have their connoisseurs, but what of connoisseurs in character? . . . Is there less range of merit in personalities than in works of art?' What gives value to Mr. Davis's presentation of character is his interest in the quality of unsophisticated life—in personality, motivation, working ethics—and not from a pedantic stand-point. His psychology, like Mark Twain's, is the result of shrewd observation and native acumen, not dependent on theory or book-knowledge. Mark Twain of course represents a national habit of humorous outlook, but as a professional humorist he could rarely afford to use his gifts for a serious—*i.e.*, artistic purpose ; much of his work is merely a matter of going through the motions of being funny in the style expected of him. In his best work (*e.g.*, *Life on the Mississippi, Roughing It, Huckleberry Finn* and the neglected *Pudd'nhead Wilson*) there is the genuine personal observation and penetrating comment which

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is really a mode of perception, shrewd not subtle, decent rather than fine, sensible not sensitive. It is a mode which always borders on criticism, necessarily implies standards for such discriminating, and naturally tends to formulate social criticism. Mark Twain's presentation of Mississippi pilots and Nevada pioneers is comparable with Davis's accounts of timber-line settlers and hay-balers. There is the same amateur philosophizing that never gets out of touch with the particular instance, the same home-cured ethics:

> 'And there was something to their belief that the harder they worked the more certainly they could count on getting something out of it. It wasn't right, for often enough a man will throw away his work for nothing, get nothing out of it, never see it again, and never know what the trouble with it was. But the rule these people knew was that they never got anything without getting in and digging for it, and the harder they dug the better the find was likely to be. So it was only natural for them to play the rule both ways, and conclude that if nothing came without work, everything must come with work. It helped their feelings to count up what a pile of toil they had accumulated that was still to be paid off.'

But the comparison is all to Davis's advantage. He is adult where Mark Twain is boyish. Though there are anecdotes and similes that his predecessor might have fathered, Davis's humour is not an end in itself but one ingredient in an attitude, an attitude much less simple than the idiom it is embodied in would suggest. His humour has more than a local point, and will be appreciated by us prigs who confess our indifference to the laboriously thought-up inanities of Messrs. Wodehouse and Thurber.

This mode of perception is not subtle in the sense of requiring to make use of the refinements of literary art. It could not do the work of Flaubert or Henry James—or Jane Austen. But it represents a valid method of examining raw human nature under pioneering conditions, without sentimentality or any corresponding bias of spurious toughness; the consequent clarity of perception produces something perhaps as effective in the analysis of motive and character as subtlety could be:

> 'It was not in vengeance and not out of any stern notions of justice that they were trailing Shiveley, leaving their own

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

work to dog the daylights out of a wounded blow-hard who would have considered it a privilege never to see any of them again. They took after him out of a much more Christian set of sentiments—pity, sympathy, concern over an old couple's helpless grief, and anxiety to find some means of expressing what they felt. They donated their pursuit in the same spirit that makes people in more settled localities donate expensive floral pieces: not to make the stricken family feel better, but as a sign that they wish they could.'

Another way of saying that Davis's attitude, though superficially humorous, is not so simple is to point to the ironic element never absent from his regard. Like *Huckleberry Finn*, *Honey in the Horn* has a central thread of plot which after meandering through plenty of incidental ironies unloosens in an explication which then reveals a latent irony to have been present throughout the book. Locally, this ironic element functions as a kind of emotional stiffening, we feel it to be an assurance that he is not imposing on us a superficial or blinkered outlook, as here where it is characteristically a refusal to trade in large self-delusions however much more pleasing the reader might find them than reality:

'The line of fires down the valley, the strange wagons pulling in and being directed to their places in the line, the knowledge that this was no longer merely a head-of-the-creek community on the move through restlessness, but an entire people, a whole division of society, gathering to tackle a new country rather than live as peons in an old one, gave him a feeling of dignity and strength that, though miles beyond his own reach, was his because he belonged to these people. This was one of the great things that happened as often as the men who financed the country financed it too much and then, instead of admitting it, undertook to squeeze their money back out of the men who worked it. Whenever that happened, which it did about every ten years, the settlers picked up and cleared out somewhere else to open new land and make themselves a new country in which, maybe, they could become the ones who did the squeezing instead of the ones who got squeezed. It was not altogether a virtuously purposed movement, but it was a great one.'

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The same honesty—a kind of moral integrity—produces the social observation. If he is free from sentimentality he is equally without animus, and his generalizations on Man the (moral) buzzard and Man the hog (of natural resources) are strictly deductions from behaviour previously documented for us. He notes characteristically of the hay-balers: 'It was impossible to feel sorry for them on account of their hard life, because they didn't know that it was hard.' He thus achieves a valuable detachment—understanding that does not lead to either undeserved pity or easy cynicism, as here:

> 'Their main object in settling there appeared to have been to find a place where civilization hadn't cornered all the opportunities for wealth away from them, and where a man could start afresh without being at a disadvantage on account of poverty and prejudice. As to the way it was working out, there could be no grounds for complaint, for they were all as even as a row of fence pickets around a court-house, with not a feather of difference either in the length of their hair or the brand of overalls they wore. But the fact that they had shrunk from civilization didn't mean that they disliked it. They had only gone a little piece up the road in hopes of heading it off instead of running after it. Now there was nothing to do but wait for it, and they were beginning to wonder, as most all-or-nothing gamblers sometimes will, whether they hadn't come a little too far, whether they shouldn't have gone somewhere else, whether they might not have been better off not coming anywhere. Mighty few prayers were ever addressed to the Throne of Grace as fervently as theirs were that old E. H. Harriman might be moved to build his railroad their way so the country would settle up and put civilization back around them again.'

The book is rich in similar pieces of observation which border on economics, sociology and social ethics. Thus wider issues are raised, the incidents cease to be merely local and assume a representative status.

> 'Once Looking Glass had been a rich locality, with six big heavy-set ranches running cattle on the open grass, each making its proprietor ten times as big an income as he needed

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> to live on. The cinch was too good to last. The valley, along in 1890, had attracted some three hundred industrious colonists, who divided the open grass-country between them and set out to make it pay as big for them as it had for the original exploiters. Since it was only good for pasture, it went right on paying the same as usual, with the difference that, instead of giving six ranchers ten times too much apiece, it gave three hundred ranchers about one-fifth enough. The colonists lived for a few years by borrowing, and when they could borrow no more they all got up and left, and the mortgagers took their land and offered it for sale for the amount of their loans, with accrued interest. That was more than anybody could afford to pay, and more than it could ever be made to pay off. So as a demonstration of the way capital operated in developing agriculture, the valley remained tied up tight, without any colonists and also without the six ranches it had supported to start with.'

An alert mind is bound to make social criticism of this nature in assembling such material, and it will seem to most readers ludicrous that the *New Republic* should have damned Mr. Davis for absence of fervour in the direction of social reform. They were perhaps misled by an introductory note which declares '. . . there is no intention anywhere in the book of offering social criticism or suggesting social reform.' Mark Twain might have said as much (he says something comparable in a foreword to *Huckleberry Finn*), yet the account each gives of his community *implies* a socially critical intelligence. What Mr. Davis was obviously trying to forestall was a charge of political bias, since many American regional novels seem to be nothing but left-wing stalking-horses.

The kind of criticism however that the serious student of literature is likely to make will be a matter of comparing the result with Mark Twain's. He of course did not know what he was doing in the sense that Mr. Davis does: there is evidently all the difference in the world between reflecting a culture that you breathe in as unconsciously as the air that you equally exist in, and trying to put together a picture of a past culture before all traces of it vanish. Equally a difference can be perceived in the quality of the cultures—behind the Oregon homesteaders, who represent, in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their mixture of nationalities, a polyglot culture, there is nothing but pioneer vitality: ' There was a jail-break that I helped with across the mountains, but it's done with now and it wouldn't matter in a stampede like this, anyhow. That's one good thing about it. Nothing counts except what's goin' on around you,' says the protagonist of *Honey in the Horn* as the book closes ; the mores of the villagers in *Huckleberry Finn* are graced by a mellower traditional civilization.

I hope I have succeeded in indicating that *Honey in the Horn* is a remarkable book, which everyone interested in either literature or social history is likely to enjoy. One hopes it will be so successful that a cheap edition will soon be available. It is a pity the novel is too improper for conventional school libraries, because it is stimulating reading at several levels ; at one it is an exciting pioneer story full of descriptions of life in the wilderness and the conquest of virgin country. Perhaps an abridged edition might be arranged for schools, since there can be few books so well suited to providing classroom discussion on *Culture and Environment* lines not only of what nature does to pioneers but also of what pioneers do to nature.

Q. D. LEAVIS.

TOTEM : THE EXPLOITATION OF YOUTH, by Harold Stovin (Methuen, 5/-).

Mr. Stovin has a very good case to make, but he does not help it by his eagerness to relate everything to Freudian psychology. He believes that such institutions as Toc H and Boy Scouts, far from educating anyone for citizenship, serve to suppress individuality and to spare their members the trouble of thought, by exacting obedience to their ' myths,' based on the usual bogus public-school code of good-fellowship and ' it isn't done '—the latter Mr. Stovin classes as equivalent to ' taboo.' This obedience is, of course, not a matter of fulfilling orders, but of moral pressure of the familiar kind being brought to bear (compare putting children ' on their honour '). This ' myth ' is ' productive of ritual ' (the account of the Toc H Birthday Festival is most interesting) which gives a false sense of security and comradeship, and makes sure that all ' thought ' on matters of importance shall be safely within

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the group framework—usually one of hearty, common-sensical Christianity. The extracts from journals of these groups are admirably chosen, and make astonishing reading—even alarming for, as Mr. Stovin points out, there is a marked similarity between the ritual of these groups and those of the German and Italian youth-movements which seem to have been praised highly in one periodical connected with boys' clubs; this danger needs emphasizing even more than Mr. Stovin has done, for the benefit of people who haven't bothered to think about these organizations, and so accept them at their own valuation or as 'not at all bad things.' Mr. Stovin's delvings into psychology, however, obscure rather than help his argument—the spiritual corruption of his quotations are self-evident, and should be left with the minimum of comment.

Mr. Stovin has another fault. In reaction to the repressive influence of the groups, he thinks anything that all the people like must be healthy—jazz and the cinema are modern folk-art. Such a statement ignores the difference between modern society and the old rural community, and it is difficult to see how the elaborate artificiality of the cinema can be equated to folk-song and music—going to the cinema doesn't constitute a creative act. It is true that the sight of earnest townspeople laboriously endeavouring to learn country dances to recapture the Spirit of Olde Englande has less vitality than a cheap dance-hall, but the jazz itself has no root in contemporary life—it is something served out to the people, rather than made by them. And Mr. Stovin's attitude becomes something much worse than a lapse in this—'Like jazz, the cinema is a most admirable catharsis [=dope?]. The personality of Greta Garbo is in itself a lyric comparable to the best of Michael Drayton or Drummond of Hawthornden [why these?]—it is pure, lovely, and it suggests a rhythm of living, which our industrial and conventional prohibitions render difficult [Grand Hotel?]. Any comment must be ribald. In destroying one lot of humbug, Mr. Stovin wants to erect another.

But the book ought to be in all school libraries, as an antidote to *Rovering to Success* and the Speech Day remarks.

FRANK CHAPMAN.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AN AMATEUR OF LITERATURE

THE LITERARY CAREER OF SIR SAMUEL EGERTON BRYDGES, by Mary Katharine Woodworth (Blackwell, 10/6).

Sir Egerton Brydges is one of those minor figures whose interest is in direct proportion to their lack of individual genius. His work is a complete guide to the taste of the Romantic period: he began writing about 1785, and his last book was dedicated to Queen Victoria. He wrote poetry ranging from amatory verses for the *Gentleman's Magazine* to the Wordsworthian-meditative *Lake of Geneva* in four books; he was among the first in this period to rediscover the sonnet (towards the end of his life he wrote more than two thousand in three years); his sentimental historical novels (which usually contained a fair sprinkling of verse) enjoyed a minor vogue; he produced a considerable amount of criticism, typical of the period in its insistence on inspiration and native genius: and besides all these there was his bibliographical and editorial work (probably the most important intrinsically), his political pamphlets, and the *Autobiography*. He was related to Gibbon, and his acquaintances included the Austen family, Southey, Scott, Wordsworth, and in Geneva, Sismondi and Gray's friend Bonstetten. He wrote in most of the chief periodicals of the time, and *Fraser's* included him in its Grand Fraserian Festival in 1836. His edition of Milton was well-known in the nineteenth century, and his reprints at Lee Priory contributed much to the study of Elizabethan literature.

Miss Woodworth's book is a careful record of the facts of Brydges' life and work: unfortunately, it is nothing more. There is a biographical chapter, a chapter on the novels, with synopses of the plots, a chapter each on the poetry and the criticism, and a concluding account of his reputation. There is practically no attempt to relate Brydges to his cultural environment, and that, after all, would have been the chief excuse for a book of this type. It is the chief fascination of the Autobiography that in it eighteenth-century assurance and nineteenth-century hysteria are so curiously mixed. On the one hand there is the Romantic conviction that the poet of genius is a sensitive plant, unfit for the affairs of ordinary life: this can be found on almost every page,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but its most delightfully complete expression is in the description of ' a person (but he died young) who seemed to me literally inspired . . . He spoke little, but very commonly appeared in a delirium or dream, and was very fretful and angry when he was interrupted . . . He drew the outlines of a sort of visionary epic, mainly composed of spirits.' Brydges was of course certain that he was himself a genius of this kind (' I confess that I am myself of that irritable and frank temperament which unfits me to be that sort of person who is vulgarly denominated a man of business ')—as certain as he was that the House of Lords had shamefully deprived him of his rightful inheritance of the barony of Chandos.

These two directions of his egotism are the chief themes of the *Autobiography*, but they are not the whole. Of more essential interest is the fact that Brydges can still assume unquestioned standards of value and a cultivated public concerned to maintain those standards. In this he is a witness as to how much of eighteenth-century culture was still surviving in the first third of the nineteenth century. However Romantic by nature, he is aware of the danger of the lowering of critical standards:

> ' Readers now demand such books as will flatter them in their opinions and feelings, not such as will lead and instruct them. How are these evils to be overcome or met? Will not literature sink under them? I think that the voice of the multitude has every day a stronger and stronger influence over it ; and so far it must decline in taste, intelligence and loftiness. Critics join the mob, and judge by the rules and measures of their standard. A genius therefore who would be popular, must write down to the popular thought and sentiment. Of this, many of the fashionable authors are glaring instances . . . The present age, while it is more conceited, is intellectually far more feeble than the precedent, as well as much less learned . . . When once we relapse recklessly from sound thinking and sound taste, the mind falls gradually and imperceptibly into the most pitiable imbecilities, errors and absurdities.'

He is always insisting that it is the duty of the critic to detect charlatanism, and that false taste in the reading public can be a serious hindrance to a writer's development ; and he has no illusions about popularity:

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> ' (The public taste) will always be led, though it affects to lead. Some master-spirit gives it the tone, and then it follows blindly, but unless some accidental circumstances concur, no genius can in the first instance command it.'

When, writing in 1834, Brydges speaks of ' those who are under the dominion of a passion for book-making,' one can only wonder what he would say of the contemporary state of affairs. At every point in his critical remarks one can feel the background of a substantial group of the cultivated on whom he can rely to agree with him in general principles ; while the specifically eighteenth-century note appears in curious ways in so double-dyed a Romantic:

> ' Sometimes imagination and sentiment are bestowed without any great degree of the rationative faculty. They may still produce beautiful creations, but not of the very grandest order. The reason is wanted, to judge and give a depth of thought.'

And even when he shakes his head over the vulgarity of publisher's advertisements, and prophesies a cultural dark age from which we cannot hope to emerge without a new Renaissance, it is plain that this is not to be taken too seriously, and that he is not greatly disturbed. So much would be obvious from a consideration of his style, which is essentially rooted in the eighteenth century. It is interesting to speculate what Brydges might have done had he lived a century earlier: as it is, a great part of his talent was simply dissipated in Romantic egotism. But compare him as a literary figure with the typical modern dilettante, and it can be seen that he represents a cultivated class with a position of authority and a sense of critical responsibility that are completely unknown to-day.

R. G. Cox.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

'CLIQUE-PUFFERY'

A SHORT SURVEY OF SURREALISM, by David Gascoyne (Cobden-Sanderson, 7/6).

THE ARTS TO-DAY, edited by Geoffrey Grigson (The Bodley Head, 8/6).

EPILOGUE : A Critical Summary, Vol. I, edited by Laura Riding (The Seizin Press, Deya, Majorca and Constable, 7/6).

When M. Fluchère wrote his article on Surrealism in *Scrutiny*[1] three years ago he ended by suggesting the need for a careful critique of the movement. Mr. Gascoyne has merely produced a second introduction to English readers of much greater length and much less cogency and suasiveness. In fact, the greater part of it is in the (one would have thought) decidedly pre-Dada academic vein of literary anecdotage. He fails in the primary object of his book: to convince one that Surrealism as a movement is worthy of close attention, and one remains with the knowledge—which one already had—that a small number of eminent individuals are or were members of it. The quotations from manifestos re-iterate in general the need for a direct relation between art and life (Mr. Gascoyne quotes Shelley in his peroration) and call in particular for an art and a poetry which directly transpose the contents of the sub-conscious on to paper or canvas. The first point has never been long lost sight of in England as far as manifestos go, and one may here note the strongly Romantic flavour which art as a product of the uncontrolled imagination has in Surrealist usage. But actually it is a mistake to use the word 'uncontrolled' too emphatically. As regards the second main point in the Surrealist programme, on artistic practice, it is useful to compare this definition:

> 'SURREALISM, n. Pure psychic automatism, by which it is intended to express, verbally, in writing, or by any other means, the real process of thought. Thought's dictation in the absence of all control exercised by the reason and outside all æsthetic or moral preoccupations.' First Manifesto, 1924.

---

[1]December, 1932.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with these words of Mr. Gascoyne's last chapter:

> ' No longer does the Surrealist await the message or the image to arise from the vast unconscious residue of experience ; he actively imposes the image of his desires and obsessions upon the concrete daylight world of objective reality.'

which seem to admit some stylization as part of the process of artistic creation. Mr. Gascoyne makes no attempt to judge the results of Surrealist creation critically, and while thanking him for what opportunity of doing this his illustrations and quotations afford one regrets that an account that describes in one even tone the poems of Baudelaire, the paintings of Picasso and a simplified game of ' consequences ' does not encourage one to believe that a critical examination of the movement would express itself in unqualified enthusiasm.

Surrealism has been a major influence in post-War culture ; it is unlikely that the inhabitants of the glass-houses at Deya, Majorca and Keats Grove, Hampstead, will achieve this kind of importance although they take upon themselves to wind up civilization and predict its future respectively. Miss Riding and her collaborators set out to ' explore the historical entirety of thought as conscientiously as a newspaper travels its world for news,' and, in fact, her simile has considerable pertinence, for it indicates most adequately the scrappiness and pretentious superficiality of their effort as shown in *Epilogue, I.* Miss Riding begins by summing up *The Idea of God* and, by implication, feminism: God = ' the something else outside man ' = woman. There is a long series of inconsequential notes on Germany, and an entirely meaningless *Address to an International Audience.* The other articles cover Rimbaud and Laforgue, painting in general, the ' Romantic Precursors.' One has the impression that the whole company have composed them out of what ideas they could remember and what they could excogitate while marooned for ten years on a desert island.

By contrast Mr. Grigson's party have an ordered outlook and awareness of the world. The word has gone round that the arts are in a difficult plight, and that there is no real public for them, though Miss Riding has found a new public called ' poetic truth ' (. . . ' the poem has no other public '). In general the contributors

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to *The Arts To-day* show a very fair sense of what's wrong with the world and are nicely ' sensible ' about Communism, etc., but when they come to do a particular job of work they show themselves lamentably involved in the contemporary muddle.

Mr. Summerson's article on Architecture seemed to me to be the soundest and I found it a helpful commentary on present day buildings. Mr. Grierson is an artist who can write critically about creative processes but I think he is rather naïvely hopeful about the artistic possibilities of propaganda. Mr. MacNeice has flashes of insight in his remarks on individual poets, but is helplessly at sea on general questions, such as the relation of technique to content ; Mr. Grigson, on the other hand, is useful, if fairly obvious, on generalities but does not base them on any very acceptable particular judgments, and is absurdly scornful of artists like Grant, Nash and Dobson. Mr. Calder-Marshall has plainly not even read all the novels he talks about, and he writes this little gem of ' Observerese ' :

> ' T. F. Powys, whose Dodder country is as mythical as Mary Webb's Shropshire, is an excellent writer, but his theme of gossiping lecherous old men and village maidens under " t'old oak tree " is extremely monotonous.'

These notes should indicate the general level of the essays. None of them are certain whether they are discussing the whole contemporary field or only the younger writers, and the criterion of inclusion is further confused by what looks like a taboo on anyone who has been praised in *Scrutiny* except of course the obviously great. In other words, whereas *Epilogue* seems to be written for the unseen reader mentioned above, *The Arts To-day,* while professing to be a guide to the layman interested in what is happening around him, is no more than what my title from Mr. Grigson's article stigmatizes. We have here a series of very mediocre ' individual statements.' Mr. Grigson claims no more for them than that they give information (which they do very inadequately), but the publishers suggest, and it is probable that many readers will assume, that they are representative. It would take more disinterestedness than is evident here to produce the survey contemplated by the blurb in the present divided state of the republic of letters.

GEOFFREY WALTON.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HUMAN ECOLOGY, by J. W. Bews (Oxford University Press, 15/-).

In this book Prof. Bews has shown how the different lines of approach to the study of life are ultimately drawn upon by ecologists whose work is concerned 'with all the interrelationships of living organisms and their environment.' They investigate in turn the organism, the environment and the functions (the complex of interrelationships). Analysis is necessary as in all the sciences but it is ever regarded as a means to an end ; the end itself being a synthesis which should help to show ' how and why man is as he is, and how and why he behaves as he does.' In fact human ecology is an ecology in which man is frankly considered to be the central organism whose relationships we are interested in, and there is some justification for regarding ecology as an attitude towards life which aims at a full appreciation of the interrelationships (processes) which almost constitute life itself. This point of view ' affords a means of testing the relative value of each means of approach in the separate human sciences.' It is essentially (when true to itself) a critical point of view.

It is important here to comment upon the relation between the ' holistic ' and the ecological point of view. This book is introduced by General Smuts who is specific in equating ecology and holism. Thus he remarks ' Prof. Bews has rightly stressed the necessity for the holistic viewpoint, of which the ecological method is a special scientific application . . . ' and comments on ' the holistic doctrine which underlies ecology.' General Smuts in this introduction, as in others of his writings, might have been happier in his choice of words and the fallacy in holistic interpretations has been ably exposed in *The Universe of Science* (H. Levy). Here it is necessary only to point out that to the ecologist there should be only one ' whole ' and not a number of 'wholes.' Prof. Bews himself refers twice to the holistic viewpoint in ecology, but otherwise, as one would expect, there are few signs of ' the more coming out of the less ' in his viewpoint of ecology. For our part, we find no ' holistic doctrine which underlies ecology.'

Prof. Bews reviews in turn the knowledge concerning the different factors of the organic and inorganic environment, the theories of heredity in man, and his physiological responses to different environmental factors and to the environment as a whole.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The relating of psychology to ecology introduces a section on man's attempts to control his environment—cultural anthropology, the prehistory of man and his early ecological and economic development. In the final chapter a general review of man's intellectual life is attempted. The book forms the first attempt to deal with the ecology of man in all its aspects from one point of view, and it is (I hope) with a full appreciation of the faculty of ' integration ' implicit in the author's task that the omission of some important sources is pointed out. The generally wide and carefully selected references might have included, for example, *The Genetical Theory of Natural Selection* (R. H. Fisher) perhaps particularly in the sections relating to heredity and civilizations and also in the final chapter.

It is perhaps inevitable at present that the examination of ' the life of man as a whole ' should be disappointing to some of its readers: the author himself comments on the shortness of the general discussion which he has limited to the last chapter of the book. Here an attempt is made to show the possibilities of an ecological approach to the study of man based upon a re-examination of our present knowledge. Some consideration is given to the bearings of ecology on human conduct, philosophy and the arts. The chapter seems, even in the present state of our knowledge, all too short. In the section on ' Human ecology as a science ' examples of social surveys are dealt with, but repeatedly one is conscious of a feeling that essential problems are being missed. It is perhaps significant that reference to *Middletown* has not been found necessary whereas the social survey made *via* the B.B.C. is found particularly interesting on account of ' the very modern methods employed.' Problems have elsewhere been revealed which cannot easily be dismissed under the heading of maladaptation to a new environment—problems concerning the dissolution of standards of life and whose dangers are at once apparent (in addition to the more usually demonstrated modern evils) on reading accounts of the widely differing societies dealt with by *Arctic Village*, *Middletown* and *Change in the Village*. There may be a connection between the omission of such sources and the fact that the sections on ' human conduct ' and ' the arts of man ' form a somewhat laboured presentation of the way in which such subjects could interest ecologists, but with no hint of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the possible findings from such a viewpoint. Yet we must be grateful to Prof. Bews for showing to those who will follow him that such subjects lie within the purview of the ecologist.

C. E. LUCAS.

CATHOLICISM, PROTESTANTISM AND CAPITALISM, by Amintore Fanfani (Sheed and Ward, 6/-).

What this book serves to bring home is that the debate concerning the influence of the Reformation on the development of capitalism is rapidly becoming, if it has not already become, of merely academic interest. It stimulated some valuable work, but the value was, very largely, incidental to the controversy, and it is impossible to be very concerned for a final verdict—if a final verdict is possible.

It would be difficult to argue with Signor Fanfani since he, or his translator, has made it impossible to know, at various crucial points, what exactly he is talking about ; neither history nor sociology can profitably be written in terms so abstract and general that they leave the reader groping for the particularities to which, presumably, the terms refer.

However, as Mr. Wells would say, ' something comes out of it.' Signor Fanfani writes as a Catholic, but his historical thesis, as it emerges, is not blindly partisan. He admits the development of capitalist enterprise in Catholic countries before the Reformation, but, he says, it was left to Protestantism to ' legitimize and sanctify ' a spirit of purely economic rationalism which the Church had sought to check. Protestantism did this, not positively as Weber maintained by introducing a new stress on ' working in one's vocation,' but negatively, by making salvation independent of works. Thus although the early Protestant leaders derived so much of their own economic teaching from the Middle Ages, the inherent logic of Protestantism led to the conception of economic activity as an independent realm governed solely by the criterion of success. Geographical and political factors, however, have also to be recognized in accounting for the industrial development of the Protestant countries.

No one need quarrel with this, and no one is likely to be very excited by it. What is of far greater importance is the question

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the social and economic problems with which we are confronted at present. 'There is,' we learn, 'an unbridgeable gulf between the Catholic and the capitalist conception of life,' and we are glad to see the point made so firmly; but Communism is equally abhorrent, and for positive guidance we are left with a single, vague, reference to 'the establishment of the Corporation' (p. 147). As a Catholic Signor Fanfani is able to see that there is a sense in which Communism is 'merely the final and most highly evolved stage' of capitalism, and, unlike most Communists, he inherits a tradition which does not equate Progress with the multiplication of wireless sets. But to the non-Catholic it seems an unreal choice that is offered: 'Let man lose this belief [in future rewards and punishments], and nothing remains for him, rationally speaking, but to act in a capitalistic manner'—*i.e.*, in a manner that is governed solely by considerations of economic expediency. It is the familiar admonition: we are to line up in one of two opposed camps, Catholic or 'materialist.' One envies those who can so simplify their problems.

L. C. KNIGHTS.

THE PRESS, by A. J. Cummings (Twentieth Century Library, The Bodley Head, 3/6).

One way or another, a use can be found for most books on the Press—critical, factual, and even Heil-Hitleritic hero-worship of Northcliffe. Mr. Cummings' book falls into none of these classes strictly, and as a whole it is something less than useful. It has informative chapters on the state of the Press in America, France and Germany, an interesting exposure of the Ottawa racket, and a welcome chapter on the part played by the *Times* and other national assets during the war. (Lord Ponsonby's survey is fuller, but one can hardly have too much light shed on such activities). Mr. Cummings is at his best when straightforwardly reporting. It will be remembered that he was the journalist who sent to the *News Chronicle* a series of admirable reports on the Moscow trials (since published in book form by Gollancz). The *News Chronicle* is a sort of half-way house between the serious newspaper and the gutter press, attempting to combine *Manchester Guardian* politics

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with a general appeal at the *Mail-Herald* stratum, with as much success as is possible. With less success Mr. Cummings' book has a rather similar complexion.

Any writer's angle on the Press is conveniently determined by his attitude to Northcliffe. Either you admire him (' He went down to the people to lift the people up '—Tom Clarke) or not (' A journalistic pander '—Norman Angell). Where Mr. Cummings stands can easily be seen: in rebuking Lord Salisbury (' the supercilious comment of a cynical aristocrat '), he writes: ' What in fact Lord Northcliffe did was not only to make newspapers a little more interesting to their readers but to make life itself a little more interesting and indeed a little more intelligible to the masses.' With that comforting belief one might leave Mr. Cummings and his book, though at the risk of appearing unfair. So perhaps a little more quotation is justified. From the start he is on the defensive against ' the fashion to decry the press,' and writes as a journalist apologizing for it in opposition to ' the contemptuous attitude of country squires, village parsons, university professors, old-fashioned politicians and others.' But one would have felt less like saying ' bogey, bogey ' if he had managed to specify some of these cantankerous critics: his only quotations are from an L.N.U. pamphlet by Mr. Kingsley Martin.

It would be tedious to reply to his elaboration of the sentence on Northcliffe already quoted. Though in passing one might ask him to find out what was the popular reading of, say, the mid-nineteenth century, and then to consider whether he was justified in noting an improvement in our day. ' Intellectual curiosity,' he writes, ' has been stimulated by this popularization of knowledge on subjects once regarded as the exclusive province of the specialist. Thousands of young men and women have been led to think more clearly and to devote themselves in their leisure to the passionate pursuit of some branch of study which would never have been brought to their notice but for some casual article in a newspaper or magazine.' Enviable as Mr. Cummings' satisfaction may be, it is a pity he did not come up against some more criticisms of the press. If he had got up his little lesson more thoroughly, he would have been aware of such analyses as that of Mr. Spender in Vol. II of *Life, Journalism and Politics,* or Sir Norman Angell's in *The Press and the Organisation of Society*—which incidentally

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is still unique, though badly in need of bringing up to date.

The series in which this book appears has an aim with which one can sympathize. It is (according to the dust-wrapper) 'intended to explain for the information of the intelligent man or woman the effect on modern thought of the metamorphosis which is affecting every aspect of our civilization to-day.' But *The Press* should have appeared elsewhere. With its cock-eyed interpretation of trends, and its unmuscular optimism for the future, the book will be as helpful as its subject to the reader anxious to understand and grapple with his environment.

DENYS THOMPSON.

The Editors announce for future publication:

THE ROBBER BARONS - - - - DENYS THOMPSON

PSYCHOLOGY AND CRITICISM - - RICHARD MARCH

SHAKESPEARE AND PROFIT-INFLATION - L. C. KNIGHTS

THE COMEDIES OF MIDDLETON - - L. C. KNIGHTS

REVALUATION: WALT WHITMAN - DONALD CULVER

ENGLISH POETRY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
F. R. LEAVIS

CULTURE AND EDUCATION:
A HISTORICAL NOTE - - - Q. D. and F. R. LEAVIS

THE MODERN UNIVERSITIES

SCRUTINY is published by the Editors, 6 Chesterton Hall Crescent, Cambridge; distributed by Deighton, Bell & Co., Ltd., Trinity Street, Cambridge; and printed by S.G. Marshall & Son, Round Church St., Cambridge, England.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED